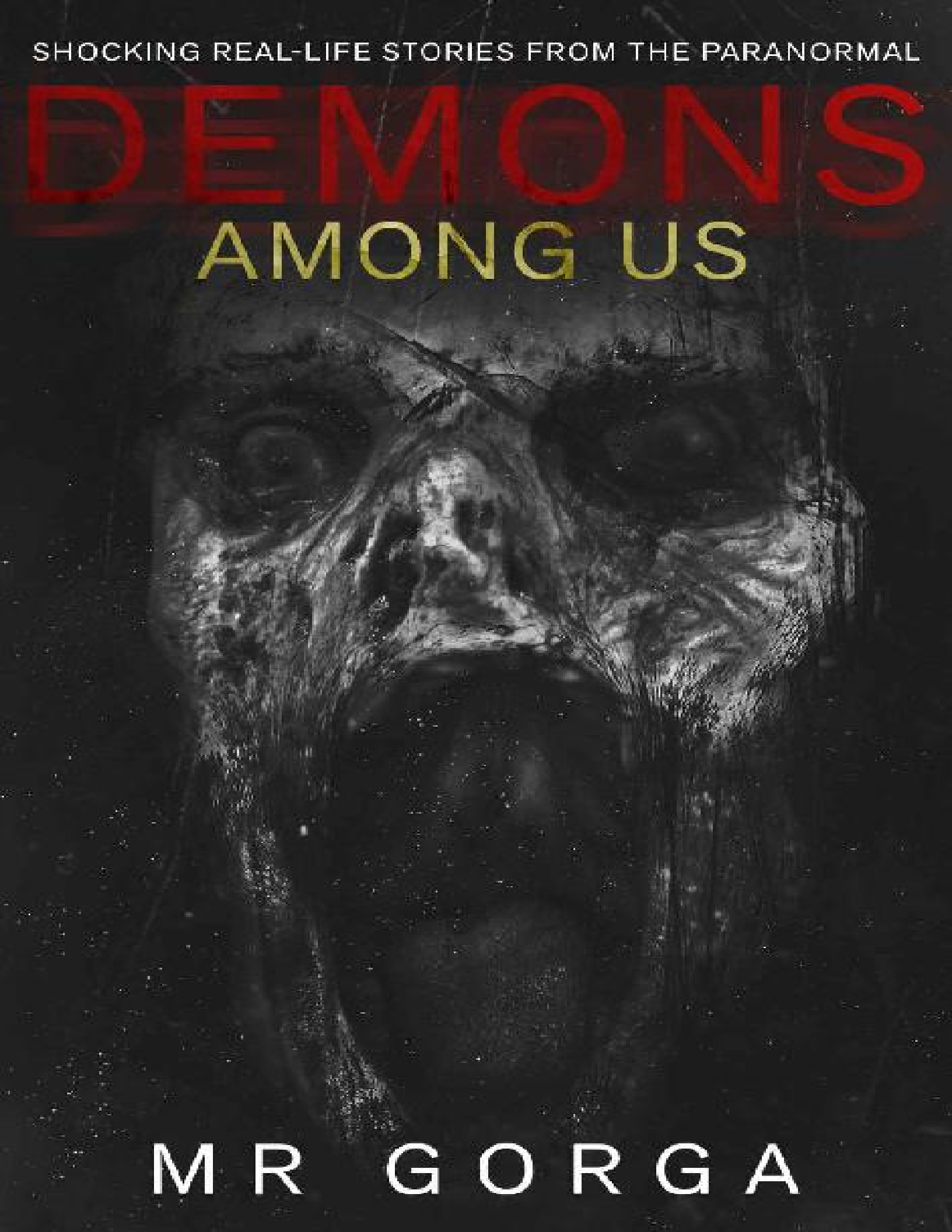
SHOCKING REAL-LIFE STORIES FROM THE PARANORMAL

DEMONS AMONG US



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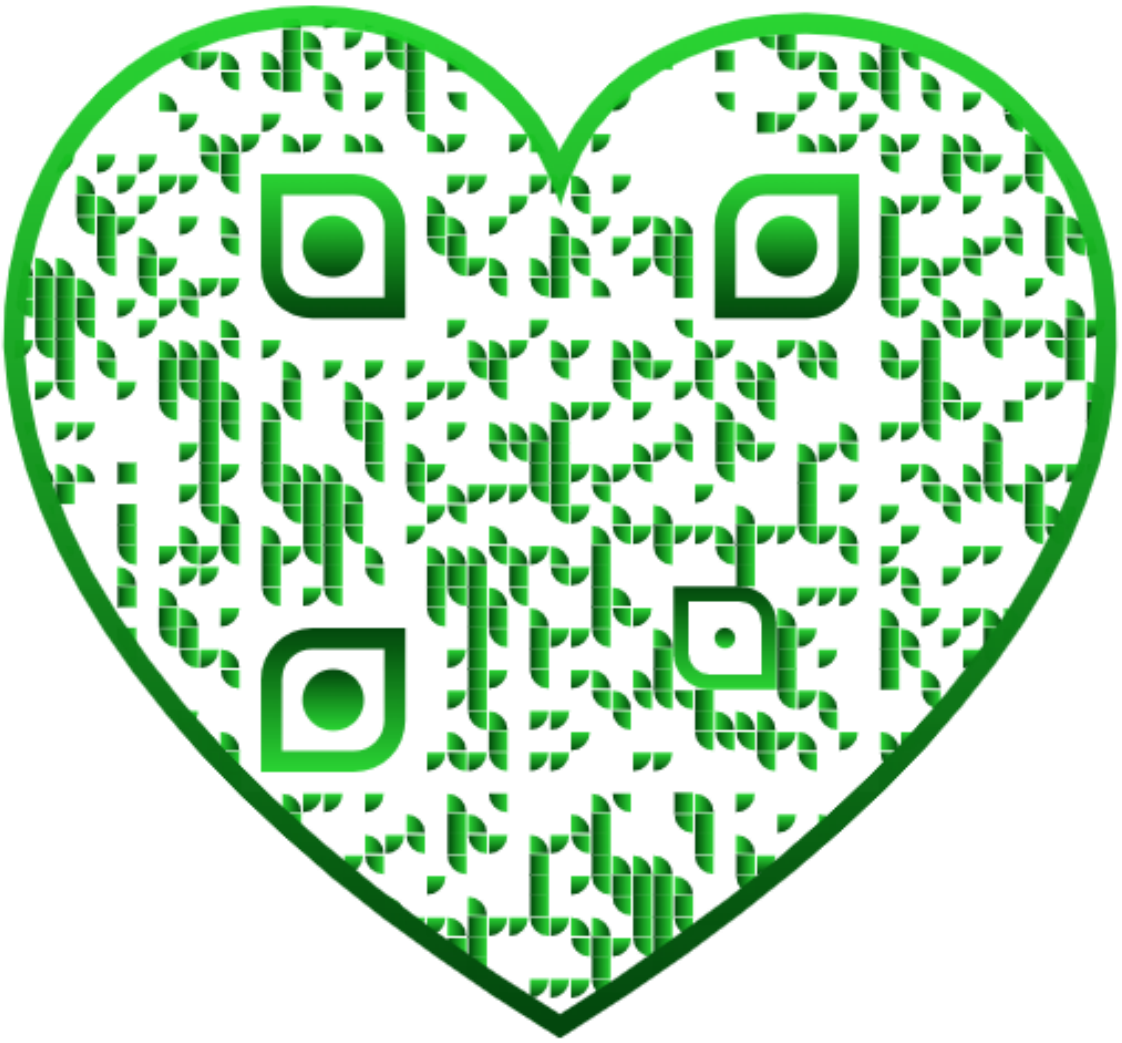

Demons Among Us
Shocking Real-Life Stories from the Paranormal

MR Gorga

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Introduction

Demons … are they real? The concept has captivated every civilization since the dawn of time. Belief in evil spirits transcends every religion, culture, and tongue. Among the first mentions on the origin of demons is the apocalyptic ancient Hebrew text, *The Book of Enoch*, thought to predate the biblical flood.

In ancient Mesopotamia, about 3,000 B.C., Lamashtu was feared as the most terrible of female demons. The bird- or lion-headed figure was believed to slaughter children, eat men's flesh, and drink their blood. The succubus was also thought to cause nightmares and disease. Demonic creatures populated the ancient Egyptians' imaginations as far back as 4,000 years ago. The demon, Ikenty, a large bird with a black, feline head, was believed to grip its victims and cut off their heads.

But do malevolent entities really exist? Or are they figments of our fears—dark imaginings to explain our own human sufferings? Is there a spirit world beyond what we can see? And could such beliefs—beliefs held by every culture throughout human history—merely be coincidence?

In my book, I explore the truth about demons and dark forces, such as:

1) The first fully recorded eye-witness account of demonic possession in American history. Reported decades before the Salem Witch Trials!

2) My personal encounters with haunting black spirits, inhuman entities, visions, and terrifying nighttime visitations.

3) How evil forces influence the world around us. How they deceive and destroy, *even kill*.

As a former copywriter, I've always felt there was more to writing than just cranking out marketing materials for clients. I mean, how many meaningless ads, articles, commercials, and social media blurbs can one write before wanting to jump off a cliff? There had to be more significance to the gift given. A deeper meaning.

A *purpose*.

The defining moment came while leading a prayer meeting at church one Thursday night. Toward the end, while gathered in a circle, I asked the small group if they had experienced any strange attacks in their sleep. Reason being … I had suffered numerous nights of unexplainable assaults—black shadows, evil whisperings, and invisible torments that caused me to wake in panicked terror—and I wondered whether I was alone, or crazy, or if there was a greater evil at work.

Soon, one by one, reluctant hands began to rise. Thirteen in all. It was a surprising moment, to say the least. But why didn't anyone speak up in the first place?

One common reason among them was that they feared being called "crazy." Each believed it was happening to only themselves, that they were alone in the matter. So, they fell silent.

That's when I realized: the church was under attack. Demonic forces were assaulting God's people, who were left wallowing in silent despair.

But then it made me wonder how many other lives had been assaulted … how many countless, unwary, unguarded souls had been haunted, tormented, and destroyed by these unholy powers.

I got angry. Something had to be done to expose evil and its many forms, to sound the alarm against these invisible enemies. War had been waged, and I needed to fight back, somehow.

This book is a direct result of that spiritual conflict. *Demons Among Us* sheds light on the darkness. Along with chilling personal and historical stories, it gives you the knowledge to recognize such spirit entities, to know whether you're hearing the lies and whispers of evil or following its influence, unknowingly. It is also the culmination of years of exhaustive study and research.

Fortunately, at one point, I gained access to the actual documents used to comprise this book, including three-hundred-and-fifty-year-old sermons … documents on witchcraft … rare notes and journals about demon possession … books and numerous court records dating to the 1600s … their flowing black script handwritten on fragile, yellowed parchment.

Clearly, to turn those leaves with my own hands was the greatest highlight of the writing process. It was as if the pages were alive, still speaking their wisdom down through the ages. The sensation that swept over me in those moments cannot easily be explained. It was a sobering power, a holy force that itself seemed supernatural, uniting me with America's vibrant, spiritual ancestry and its history.

It is my sincere hope that you are awakened to the dark, dangerous forces all around you and, as you might expect, experience the creeps along the way. *Demons Among Us* peels back the veil of the paranormal, to expose the true nature of evil and what it *really* looks like. And what lurks on the other side may truly terrify you.

Section One

Hauntingly True Events

Fear paralyzes. Especially when it's real.

The following real-life stories will creep under your skin … and into your nightmares.

Chapter One

Dark Obsessions

"I fear not the dark itself, but what may lurk within it."
— Unknown

DO DEMONS EXIST? FOR SOME, they are imagined, folklore. For others, a metaphor; a symbol in which to explain the ills of society. While some attach the cruelties of the world to this emblem, others see demons purely as entertainment—the stuff of movies, literature and art. A way to experience a cheap scare or the heebie-jeebies.

Then there are those who know differently. Those, like me, who have faced *actual* demons … and lived to tell the tale. These unfortunate souls have encountered things so frightening that no movie can truly capture the terror. For them, it is undeniable. Demons are real. A pure, almost palpable evil wished upon no living soul. None can convince them otherwise …

3 a.m. A grip fastened at my throat. Startled awake, I bolted upright, sucking the air as I rose. Dazed and terrified, I clawed nervously at the unseen fingers tightening at my windpipe. Someone—something—was choking me. *Killing me.* But, who? What?

While trying to pry free the clutch, I scanned the room for the assailant … but found none. Neither could I see the hand, or whatever it was attached to. I only felt its steely grip, squeezing.

The touch was cold, crude, invisible. I cried out, but the words wilted at my lips, weak and whispery. A whelp. And up close, I sensed a face press close to mine, like a lover moving in for a kiss. Only, this was no kiss. And certainly, no lover. Lingering at my lips was another set of lips, I perceived

… a shadowy mouth syphoning the words as they escaped, sort of like the way smoke is inhaled. Except now it was swallowing my pleas. Breath dying.

At the same time, a presence filled the room—dark, gloomy, powerful. And with it a charged hatred. Deep disdain. The hot hate blanketed like boiling tar, burning into every muscle and sinew. Its venom paralyzed. Something was in the room with me. Something unseen. Something dark, deadly.

Evil. And whoever—whatever—it was, had just one thing in mind—death. Mine. It was the first of the night strangulations.

Evil lives. Yet, surprisingly, most cannot recognize it. Even when it is right before their eyes. Shockingly, most are oblivious to the evil forces at work in the world. Many fail to recognize the threat they pose to their everyday existence. How it influences and controls nearly every action, decision, and life path taken. Demons have reigned supremely without opposition. Without permission and—at all costs—in absolute secrecy.

Today, evil has penetrated every facet of society, from subterranean slums to high society, from the little house on the corner to the White House. It has seduced families, people you know and work with, from the CEO to the next cubicle at the workplace. It has consumed corporations, governments, churches. Even the Supreme Court has been caught in its widely-cast web. Celebrities, athletes, media moguls, corporate giants, high profile politicians—all under its almost indiscernible spell. No one is spared from its persuasions.

Nobody is safe.

What clasped my throat like an iron collar? What pulled me from rest, only to wake with dark dread? Was it a night terror? Sleep paralysis?

Perhaps imagined. Clearly, I was not the first to experience such a dreaded thing. Many have claimed to wake with horror at the witching hour. The phenomenon has been reported for centuries. Some cultures believe it a night hag or witch who sits on your chest, restricting your breath and movements. Another explanation, a medical one, is that it is a symptom of narcolepsy or sleep apnea.

Had it not been for the black figure moving across the room, I might have felt the same. Its presence was detected immediately after the strange grip lost hold and breath suddenly rushed in, when the shade strode through the cramped Brooklyn apartment, jet-black against the dark. It was not a shadow, undoubtedly. There was substance to its opaque form. It was as much silhouette as it was shape. Cloaked and hooded, the phantasm moved effortlessly across the apartment floor—walking yet gliding somehow. The space darkened. Like a cloud passing before the sun, it engulfed the silvery moonlight pouring through the window and onto the lacquered hardwood floor as it went… before it dissolved into the living room wall.

America has an insatiable appetite for the supernatural. Luckily, for the not-so-faint-of heart, the entertainment industry is there to serve up its haunting delights en masse. The paranormal has become a multi-billion dollar industry, with occult themes dominating nearly every medium—romantic vampires generate best-selling books, sexy witches deliver top ratings for TV networks. Cable and streaming services haunt audiences with ghostly and supernatural encounters. Otherworldly wizards draw epic profits at the box office.

Pop culture is addicted to the paranormal. Psychic mediums turn up regularly on talk shows to conjure the dead. Paranormal investigations appear on numerous networks. And if it’s a darker urge you crave, then

HBO's *American Horror Story*, Showtime's *Penny Dreadful,* Fox's *Lucifer*, and A&E's *Damien* deliver a more daring fix.

But the supernatural is not just for adults. Kids crave it, too. Take *Teen Titan's Go!* on the Cartoon Network. The animated series offers young viewers a taste of its supernatural enchantments—a colorful dose of super-powered teenagers out to save the world. There's an overly optimistic alien princess, a cynical half-demon, a laidback cyborg. Add a boy who transforms into animals and throw in a young, power-mad version of Batman's sidekick, Robin, and you get a kid-friendly concoction that mesmerizes young viewers into a swirly-eyed state of consciousness. A gateway drug to the spirit realm.

There's more. Zombies, gods, monsters, shapeshifters, even superheroes. People are hooked. Audiences can't seem to get enough of their unworldly powers.

While these offer a unique form of entertainment, only one topic disturbs the human psyche like no other …

Possession.

It's terrifying. The mere thought strikes an eerie chord in our darkest imaginations. Humanity and Hollywood wrestle to understand this controversial issue. Movies about exorcisms disturb audiences with their unnerving portrayals of the demon possessed. But, what makes possession so disturbingly fascinating? Is it the thrill of a good scare? Or something deeper? Perhaps it conjures the questions buried deep within, questions that haunt the human imagination.

Are demons real?

Does hell exist?

Heaven?

Whatever the reason, the devil is big business. And if box office earnings prove anything, people can't get enough of his devices. Just look at these numbers.

In 2005, Sony Pictures released *The Exorcism of Emily Rose.* Based on a true story, an agnostic lawyer defends a parish priest accused of negligent homicide after a failed exorcism. The film's opening weekend was ranked #1 in 2,981 theaters across the U.S. and grossed more than $75 million in total domestic sales alone. Actress Jennifer Carpenter's demonic bodily contortions terrified viewers and delivered a virtually true-to-life performance of one possessed of evil spirits.

Not to be eclipsed, Warner Bros. Pictures released its 2013 paranormal showdown*, The Conjuring.* Set in the 1970s, paranormal investigators, Ed and Lorraine Warren, investigate a haunted Rhode Island farmhouse that once belonged to an accused witch who sacrificed her one-week-old son to the devil then killed herself.

The film was met with critical acclaim, earing $318 million worldwide. A box office smash. But America's demon craze is nothing new, it stretches back decades of cinematic history.

Audiences were first exposed to possession in 1973, in what is arguably the scariest film to ever hit the silver screen—*The Exorcist.* The plot unfurls as two Catholic priests seek to drive an evil entity from a teenage girl. The audience's reaction was staggering, legendary.

No one could've predicted what happened upon the movie's release—not even Director William Friedkin. Audiences were scared senseless. Mass hysteria ensued. People often fainted, vomited, and went into convulsions while watching the film. Some left early because they couldn't endure the horror. Theater owners even stocked up on smelling salts to revive those who passed out during the film.

It was a cultural phenomenon. Never had a movie created such sensation. The media deemed it, "The Exorcist Experience." Stanley Kauffman, in *The New Republic*, wrote, *"If you want to be shaken—and I found out while the picture was going that that's what I wanted—then* The Exorcist *will scare the shit out of you."*

The first horror film nominated for Best Picture at the Academy Awards, it became one of the highest grossing films in history—over $441 million in lifetime earnings worldwide. Today, it is widely recognized as the scariest film of all time.

*The Amityville Horro*r ushered in a new era of unearthly terror some six years later. It would become the playbook for generations of horror filmmakers to come. Based on Jay Anson's best-selling novel, newlyweds, George and Kathy Lutz, are terrorized by demonic forces after moving into their new home in Amityville, New York, the site of a grisly mass murder a year before. When a Catholic priest is enlisted to bless the home, a series of frightening paranormal events occur. After further research, they discover that a known Satan worshipper had once lived on the land.

The 1979 summer release took audiences by storm. Although it was snubbed by critics, it became a cult hit. It was the year's second-highest grossing film, taking in $86,432,520 at the box office. Today, the story of *The Amityville Horror* has spawned a series that currently consists of thirteen films.

But, why do audiences clamor for such morbidity? What about these devilish themes makes them so intrigued? Perhaps, in part, because the subject matter is real.

Chapter Two

American Demoniacke

"Discontent lays us exceeding open to the assaults of Satan."
— Samuel Willard, Minister

POSSESSION IS NOT THEATER. IT is a grim reality for those under its malevolent power. While top-grossing films and books may entertain wide audiences, the real-life victims depicted in them have endured terror on an unimaginable scale. Yet there is one tale left untold. One that has escaped the attention of Hollywood and its publishing counterpart. A true story, older than the Salem Witch Trials. It has been lost to time, preserved in history. It is, perhaps, the most terrifying story ever told—the first fully-recorded, eye-witness case of demonic possession in American history.

New England, 1672

"There is a great deal of enquiry made about the devil's agency and raising of spirits against such," the minister said from behind the pulpit of a plain Puritan church. "It is not usual for God to give Satan such liberty and power, so to rock and torture, so to hurry and perplex poor creatures."[1]

Parishioners hung to the preacher's every word, still haunted by the events that had rocked the remote Massachusetts village of Groton.

Reverend Samuel Willard stood stately before the flock inside the meeting house, a humble, log-built church, its timbered walls rough to the touch. It was drafty and cold.

Samuel Willard wore a long black Genevan robe to his buckled, black shoes. His hair was dark, parted down the middle, and lay in neat waves at his shoulders. His eyes shone as dark gemstones as he spoke. And just

below his dimpled chin, a white cravat was tied around his neck, stark against the black fabric. He favored the trendier fashion to the dated ruffs of earlier Protestant preachers.

The diamond-paned window at his back, the largest of three, shone with pale sunlight. And to those seated in rows of wooden benches, six on either side of a planked aisle, men on one side and women on the other, it gave him a rather ethereal quality as he preached.

Among parishioners, he seemed wiser than his thirty-two years allowed. And wiser still since first being voted town minister at a 1663 General Town meeting some nine years earlier, where he vowed to lead the church until his death. As town minister, his influence was unequaled in the colony. Samuel Willard was deemed God's appointed ruler in the community, a divine.

"But we have seen, yea, seen such things as one would think might melt or break an heart of stone … Those hellish and diabolical cruelties, those strange gestures, those dreadful voices; and therefore, if we be not awed and affected by it, who should?"[2] His tone was deliberate, his voice ringing with concern as he recalled the strange atrocities that had befallen a young girl of the village, one of his own flock. She was sixteen. She was his maidservant. She was rumored to be possessed by the devil.

Samuel should know. He had been there. He had been an eyewitness to the twisted exploits of his young maid. The bizarre incidents had unfolded in his own home, before his very eyes. And over the course of three months, Samuel had chronicled the precise details in a journal, frightening as it all had been. Then, once the ordeal had run its course, Samuel had delivered his findings to Boston's most revered minister, Increase Mather. That had been in January 1672. It would take twelve more years before New Englanders learned en masse of the petrifying case of Elizabeth Knapp.

“Learn by it that Satan is busy in places of gospel light, to seduce and draw away souls from attending the means of grace. The light of the gospel doth not clear and free places from Satan or his bold temptations, these infernal spirits of darkness will come here. And there endeavor to raise mists and fogs to seduce souls; and therefore, let us learn not to live securely under the enjoyment of the Gospel of grace, but to spend our time of sojourning here in holy fear.”[3]

Fear they did. Only, it was not the holy kind, rather unholy.

Groton was a tiny pioneer settlement on the edge of civilization. Carved into the interior of a vast forest, the remote colony was founded by early English settlers, Puritans, who had sought refuge in the New World. Escaping the bloody religious persecution of their English homeland, these Reformationists had first hewed crude habitations out of the impassible wood. These crossed the Atlantic to practice a purer religion rather than the rituals imposed by the Church of England and its Roman Catholic influences. *Popish trash*. They desired a simpler faith, one founded on true biblical precepts, without pomp, prideful ceremony, and the ordination of priests and popes. The New World was their haven. The mission was a divine one: to settle the country as a “beacon on a hill,” a holy nation, the likes of which the world had never seen. It was, in essence, their New Jerusalem.

The Promised Land.

Some thirty miles from Boston, Groton was home to roughly seventy households. It was surrounded by a veritable jungle, teeming with beasts and other wild things—Native Indians. *Savages*. Indigenous tribes that encircled the forest posed a continual threat to New Englanders with their mischievous and barbarous acts.

It was a settlement on the edge of nowhere. The kind of place that never came to mind once you left. It had one main artery, Main Street. Once a footpath carved by native tribes, outsiders traversed the rutted lane on their way to more significant locales. In fact, the town was so insignificant that early pioneers hardly cared to give it a proper name. It went by *Grooton, Grauton, Growton,* and some twenty variations before having settled on its current epithet.

Remote as it was, Groton was not without charm. The land was rich with sprawling meadows, orchards, hills, valleys, pastures, brooks, and swampy wetlands. Two main meadows sprawled the countryside: Half-Moon Meadow swept east of the village and Broad Meadow west. Each were about a hundred acres.

To the northwest, Gibbet Hill rose proudly over the landscape. Herds of spotted cows—branded with the initials *GR* for Groton—grazed on its hillsides. Near the foot of the hill, Martin's Pond nestled in the lush woodland. To the east, the Nashua River snaked along its border, a slithering black band that sliced the thicket in two.

Summertime Groton came alive. Yellow buttercup and purple aster stirred in the breeze, rippling behind grassy green hills, as far as the eye can see. Pink soapwort and lavender-colored geranium speckled overgrown grasses along roadsides, as did common blue violet, which also decorated the forest.

Black-capped chickadee and flycatcher sang melodically from the leaves of oak, maple and chestnut trees. Villagers woke to their songs to plow farmland, tend cattle, and simply go about their daily business.

Summer had long gone. The season's cheer had given way to the mean, grey gloom of fall and winter, when a great darkness fell upon Groton.

Reverend Samuel Willard further addressed his flock.

"There is no place free, no, not the House of God from Satan's temptations. When thou art in God's House, and thy bodily presence to attend the ordinances, the dispensing of the Gospel, Satan will come thither, as he often did to this poor creature."[4]

The message struck a collective nerve, as hearers stirred at the notion. The thought, the audacity, of the Wicked One appearing in the very place they worshipped was an unsettling one.

Samuel often weaved the latest events into his sermons. He believed them signs of heaven. Natural disasters, disease, crop "blastings," and Indian raids were thought ordered and predetermined by the Almighty, God's voice. Samuel called them "speaking providences." *Omens.*

Such divine messages were meant to cause self-examination, meant to amend ungodly ways, and to spur hearers toward righteousness in God through Jesus Christ. If not, they were under God's judgment, or marked by the devil. In this case, he cited his afflicted maid.

Elizabeth Knapp was a most extraordinary sign; none could argue. Samuel seized the chance to address a mix of parishioners: frontier folks, trappers, fur traders, and farmers; converted, unconverted. But it was those of Elizabeth's ilk whom he addressed more concernedly, those closest to the phenomenon.

"You that are young ones, behold here one of your tribe and form, as I may say, one of your own years picked out of you by the wise Providence of God, to be made an object of God's severity, and man's pity… That if young ones will not have Christ to reign over them; he may give them over into the hands and power of Satan; if Christ's sweet governments do not please you, you shall be left under the tyranny and cruelty of the devil.

"Let it awaken you … Let it shew you the great danger you go in every hour of being made a prey to Satan."[5]

Poor creature. Elizabeth was young and willowy, with skin the shade of moonlight. To look at her, with her sheepish smile and maturing, girlish figure, she was not the fairest flower in the garden. But the years spent working in her father's fields had given her a hardiness that only a wilderness life could produce. She had heavy-lidded, grey-green eyes, which also matched her wardrobe, a moss bodice and grey petticoat, common for her station. Her straw hair, when unpinned from beneath a white linen coif, reached down her back, straight and lusterless. Light freckles sprinkled the bridge of her nose. Her apron ran about the same length as her dress, also white linen. Though somewhat plain, there was a certain charm to her juvenile features. At this point, Elizabeth was on the verge of change, becoming something more than what she had bargained.

Elizabeth Knapp was born to James and Elizabeth Warren Knapp on April 21, 1655, in Watertown, Massachusetts. Seven years later, the Knapps moved to Groton. The family home was situated on the south end of Main Street, on the west side, bounded by Broad Meadow. James Knapp had received the ten-acre lot as an original settler of the town. The fledgling forest colony was where he meant to make a new life for him and his family.

Elizabeth grew up an only child. Though not by design, but tragedy. Her brother, James II, died at just four months old. A trauma that, perhaps, had had serious repercussions on Elizabeth's developing mind.

Elizabeth Knapp was born of common stock. A carpenter by trade, Elizabeth's father was a man with a checkered past, while her mother was one of questionable wits. Neither sumptuous nor poor, the family held a modest standing in the community. But a few years after arriving in Groton, James Knapp seemed to make a change for the better and things started to look up for the family. In 1665, he was elected as a Selectmen and served

various civic and official positions. The esteem helped raise the family's standing and economic status. And for the Knapps, things seemed to be on the uptick. Yet, for all the privileges his newfound importance brought, it wasn't enough to keep young Elizabeth from a life of servitude.

At one point, Elizabeth was offered as a maidservant to Reverend Samuel Willard. It's hard to know why James Knapp dislodged his only daughter and placed her under his care; to live under his roof instead of her own. It's possible that the move would somehow improve the family income, and possibly gain favor with Samuel himself. It would spare James Knapp the duties of raising Elizabeth while, at the same time, placing the financial burden squarely on the minister. Things such as food, clothing and, more importantly, education would fall to his responsibility. Even so, it was a move that could have been taken as rejection of the worst kind, a betrayal. Such a move would make Elizabeth feel abandoned, isolated, and alone. Perhaps cursed. Resentments would smolder. Left unchecked, the ugly feelings would unquestionably lead to further isolation, despair, rage, or worse.

Whatever the case, the station left her wanting something … more.

Elizabeth had a mild way about her. She was amiable, well-mannered, and not easily stirred to argue, a good worker. She was likable, too, with the naïve curiosity that came with her budding youth. But things were about to change inside Elizabeth, and not for the better.

Elizabeth boarded with another maid, a rather nervous girl with mousy features, in a cramped chamber inside the home. Around Elizabeth's age, she went by Grace but was anything but her namesake. Whereas Elizabeth appeared self-assured around her superiors, Grace often grew clumsy in their presence. Grace Whitney was anything but graceful.

Samuel Willard's home on Main Street stood at the center of town. The two-story clapboard garrison was the largest home in Groton. One of the town's numerous defensive structures, it was built to protect against Indian attacks. The home, a short haul from the meeting house, had been donated by the town for his ministerial services.

Inside, a walk-in hearth filled the back wall of the common room, its stones blackened by fire. Tall and wide, its mouth was large enough to fit a full-grown adult, or sacrifice an ox, or whatever else. On the thick, wooden mantle above sat some pewter plates and a cider pitcher. Behind, a rectangular tapestry of patterned vines stretched across the wall, garnet and green. Other than these few niceties, the home remained rather plain, lest he appear too sumptuous, too *comfortable*, among his community. It was here, in the fall of 1671, the disturbances first awakened in Elizabeth Knapp.

Horror came sweet. In truth, it didn't seem like horror at all … at first. It didn't come as you might expect—in the form of a horned beast or hairy monster—but as a giggle; a sweet, tiny, innocent giggle. She had not been at Samuel's long, maybe a few weeks, before Elizabeth began to act a bit odd, Samuel noticed.

While sweeping the floorboards of the common room one day, Elizabeth let out a titter, a sugary-sweet note directed at nothing particular. Perhaps a thought or memory had tickled her. Her giggling soon increased, a slight titter here and there. Then it grew frequent, then harder, then harder still, until the room filled with uncontainable laughter … until the broom fell from her grip, and she fell to the ground with ecstatic squeals, rolling about the boards, holding her aching guts, in tears. A strange giddiness had possessed her, it seemed.

Samuel was not so thrilled. Whatever the object of her merriment, he couldn't tell. It appeared his maid was alone in the jest. The hysterics struck

him as odd, like a piano chord played off-key, a sour note. It was not that he didn't enjoy a good roar now and again, but there was something unsettling in that eccentric laugh of hers, something *off*.

Samuel's wife felt the same. When Abigail (Sherman) Willard first witnessed her behavior, her concerns immediately turned toward their children: John, who was eight; little Abigail, about six; Samuel Junior, five; and the youngest, Mary, who had scarcely turned two. *What harm might come to her?*

Samuel was somewhat dismissive toward Elizabeth's behavior at first. Her actions had certainly raised eyebrows, but it did little to raise any deep concerns on Samuel's part. After all, Elizabeth showed herself dutiful, polite, and fond of the children, the babe especially. *'Tis probably nothing*.

But Elizabeth's laughter wasn't all that was funny. Other signs followed. Whenever she fell to stitches, there was a slight change in her features, Samuel saw. Her expression seemed different, distorted somehow. He couldn't quite make it out, or even describe it, but whatever it was, it was noticeable. It could be she was getting sick, perhaps.

Then there were the shrieks. Those troubling shrieks. Along with the hysterics, Elizabeth broke into hideous, wild cries, more disturbing than any savage Samuel had ever heard. Near two weeks would pass before Samuel took to his journal, to pen his initial concerns.

> *Monday, October 30, 1671*
>
> *This poor and miserable object, about a fortnight before she was taken, we observed to carry herself in a strange and unwonted manner, sometimes she would give sudden shrieks, and if we enquired a reason, would always put it off with some excuse, and then would burst*

> *forth into immoderate and extravagant laughter, in such wise, as some times she fell onto the ground with it: I myself observed oftentimes a strange change in her countenance, but could not suspect the true reason, but conceived she might be ill, and therefore divers times enquired how she did, and she always answered well; which made me wonder.*[6]

Tragedy struck. It first unfolded that ill-fated evening. Exquisite was the pain Elizabeth felt before retiring to bed that night. While sitting hearthside, she was struck with a sudden pain in her legs. Sharp and cruel, it was as if a dagger had been plunged into her flesh. It seared hotter than the flames cracking in the fireplace. Elizabeth folded at once.

"Oh, my legs," she cried, grabbing her limbs. "My legs!" Elizabeth howled at the pain.

No sooner had she complained before the ache shot to her breasts. Elizabeth, clutching her bosom, wailed in agony. Tears began to fall down her pale cheeks. Again, the pain shifted. Her throat this time. It bolted upward, a flash of lightning through her form, striking her esophagus. Something clutched her throat—a grip, an invisible iron hand—tightening slowly. It cut off her windpipe, restricted her breath. Elizabeth sucked at the air. She tried to cry out but only whelps and wordless pleas escaped. With failing breath, she clawed at her neckline, terrified, eyes as big as plates. Elizabeth Knapp was being strangled, it seemed. Choked to death by some … thing.

Her world went black. Her legs jellied, and she collapsed onto the plankboards with a light *thud*. Her limbs tightened, stiff as a poker. Her

breath died. Yet, strangely, her consciousness did not. Elizabeth lay on the floor as a wounded creature, suspended between two worlds. Alive. Dead.

All this had happened while Samuel was away on personal affairs. Unaware of the events that had unfolded, he was ill-prepared for the grim homecoming that awaited him.

The season's first snowfall began at predawn as Samuel made his way home. It was only a light flurry, but the bitter chill was enough to knife through his woolen overcoat.

Wispy tendrils rose from the remains in the hearth when Samuel entered. Inside, charred embers still crackled and glowed Halloween-orange beneath black and ash. He could smell the smoky-sweet scent lingering in the room. Home.

He had barely brushed the snow from his sleeves when he discovered Elizabeth's body lying awkwardly near the fireplace. She was corpse-stiff, joints tightened, fingers half-crippled, breathless. *Is she dead*?

Shocked and alarmed, Samuel hurried toward her crooked form and knelt beside her.

"Elizabeth," he whispered aloud. "Wake up … *Elizabeth*."

Sudden dread crept over him as he patted her cheek. It was hard to the touch but not cold, as a corpse would feel. Perhaps the hearth had warmed her skin, he guessed.

No response. She lay as a petrified branch, eyes squeezed tight. The air thickened with uncertainty.

Samuel was so taken aback that he hadn't noticed Abigail standing at the foot of the stairwell. She had hurried down the moment she had heard him enter. She had hardly slept. She was tired and clearly worried, her loose toffee curls disheveled.

“You should have been here,” she said anxiously, adjusting her nightclothes, a simple white linen shift. Groggy, the lack of sleep made her voice sound earthier than usual.

Samuel glanced back sharply. “Hell’s teeth, what is wrong with her? Is she—”

“Dead? I think not.” Abigail approached cautiously. “Almost, I dare say. She has suffered the night in this manner.”

“The children?”

“Affright is all. John and Abbey ushered the babe upstairs at the worst of it.”

“Tell me all,” Samuel insisted. “What has happened here?” He rose.

Abigail began slowly. “She was at the fires when she burst forth with those extravagant laughs of hers. Thou knowest. Then the dreadful bellows. Hideous.” She looked away hastily, her common reaction to things she disliked. “Next, I observed her to stop breathing and collapsed upon the floor … and so …” She waved a hand over the half-dead maidservant.

“Perhaps she has taken ill,” Samuel offered.

For a long moment, the pair studied Elizabeth’s still form, wondering. The pulse of the dwindling flames cast an eerie hue upon her face. She was strangely still.

They were lost in thought when a loud *pop* tore through the silence. A log had crumbled in two, sending red-orange cinders rushing through the stack. Abigail spooked but quickly gathered her wits. She pulled the shift tight at her chest.

“They are sore afraid, Sam.” Her voice was low, thick with concern. “As am I.”

Samuel rubbed his chin and exhaled deeply. “Poor creature. I shall send for Dr. Edwards forthwith. Perhaps a bleeding or some physick might make

her well."

"Pray thee," she complained, "that could take a fortnight. What shall we to do till then?"

"Pray."

Samuel tried to tell himself it was nothing. But a little voice whispered otherwise, dark, menacing. Pushing the thought away, Samuel stuffed it down, deep down.

The day grew stranger, and darker. As did Elizabeth. It was late afternoon when the dreaded spell broke, and she came to at last. She awoke to the children jabbing her with an iron poker from the hearth. Samuel shooed them off angrily and helped her to her feet.

She appeared confused, unsure of her surroundings, unsure how long she had been on the ground. Unsure of what might come next.

Still, it wasn't long before her antics started again. Evidently, the laughter spells had not run their course. Instead, they continued as before, only with a bizarre new twist to her already twisted behavior.

Strange animal sounds followed. Elizabeth began to mimic various farm animals and their related noises. *Foolish and apish gestures*, Samuel called them. *Strange.*

Like a pendulum, Elizabeth's emotions passed from one extreme to the next. From laughter, to folly, to tears. After the laughing fits … after the absurd barnyard imitations, Elizabeth sank into a pit of despair, deep, dark. She grew melancholy and began to weep uncontrollably for no reason at all.

Samuel's attempts to discover the reason went unreturned. Despite his best efforts, she refused to be comforted. Wicked tears, her only response. As to what grieved her, Samuel couldn't say. Neither could Elizabeth.

Elizabeth's condition was a mystery. Until now, there had been no visible signs or symptoms. No warnings. None that Samuel could tell,

anyhow. One minute she was well, and the next …

Even so, one thing was painfully clear: Elizabeth Knapp was coming apart at the seams, and vexed beyond knowing.

The day was far spent, but far from over. In the evening, Elizabeth ventured down into the cellar. Perhaps for one last boring chore before bed. Did she hear something? Or had she been summoned? Only Elizabeth knew. A beeswax candle lit the way as she delved into the darkness below the home.

The wooden stairs felt cold beneath her bare feet. The steps creaked. The cellar was cold and dark and smelled of must. Whatever the reason for going, it was fast forgotten when a strange sight made her blood run with ice. There, outside the ring of candlelight, veiled in shadow, stood two black figures. A pair of ink-black silhouettes, blacker than the darkened surroundings. Their stares bore through her.

Startled, Elizabeth shrieked and bolted recklessly up the stairwell. In a witless panic, she forgot to draw up her skirts. The cloth snagged beneath her feet, and she lost her footing, stumbling clumsily on the steps while trying to grip the candle. She deftly caught herself and climbed toward the crack of light atop the stairs. Heart hammering, Elizabeth barreled out the door and barged into the chamber where Samuel was entertaining some guests, interrupting the small gathering. Her breathing was rapid.

“Master Willard!” she cried. “Come quick. Something below the stairs!”

Samuel glanced at her then back at his guests, somewhat annoyed.

When he asked the meaning of all this, Elizabeth danced impatiently. “Two specters.” Tears welled in her eyes. “*PRITHY!*”

When Samuel saw that she was visibly shaken and wouldn’t be dissuaded, he directed some others to investigate the matter. Was it ghosts?

A *fancie*? Whatever the case, something in the darkness had rattled her core. Samuel was sure it was nothing, or so he hoped.

One led the way down the stairwell, carrying a brass lantern with paneled glass. Elizabeth could smell the honey-smoked scent as she trailed behind the rest. It did little to mask the sour must. The flame threw spastic shadows along the stone walls. Elizabeth ignored the queasy feeling in her belly as she warily tiptoed the steps she had vaulted up moments earlier, fingers trailing the rough stone. A stair creaked.

When the company had reached the bottom, they fanned out into the vault. They searched every dark crevice … behind barrels of beer and apple cider … behind stockpiles of Indian corn, salted pork, wheat, and peas—the winter stock, partial payment given by the town's residents for Samuel's ministerial services.

It was as they expected, of course. Nothing. But just as they were about to call off the search, Elizabeth suddenly whipped around, stared fixedly at a far corner of the room for an instant, then announced, "What cheer, old man!" She sounded excited.

Silence followed. The dead kind. All Elizabeth could hear was the sound of her heart drumming in her ears. There were no bugbears or hobgoblins or fairies, nor any such thing hiding in the shadows. None the others could see, anyhow.

That was odd. Rather than the dread she had expressed moments earlier, her tone rang with a certain familiarity, even thrill. What, or who, was lurking in the dark? Was it a jest? Hallucination? Either way, the search was abruptly called off, ridiculous as it seemed.

The night is full of terrors, Elizabeth would learn. A bad feeling gripped her as she crawled into bed that night. Her thoughts were ominous. Something awful would happen to her while she slept, she felt. Maybe

death. Elizabeth pulled the bedclothes halfway over her face, curled into the fetal position, and peered anxiously into the night.

Watching.

Waiting.

Waiting … for what?

The covers offered little hope, and even less protection against nighttime frights. Soon, her eyes grew heavy, helpless to stay the inevitable slumber, and whatever the dark held. Reluctant and afraid, Elizabeth dozed off. What would come of the night?

At twilight, Elizabeth's body lifted inches off the straw-filled mattress. Mysteriously, she drifted above the floorboards and hovered there for a short time. Limp and wrapped in the blanket, her body seemed a child carried to bed in loving arms, or to the grave by some murderer. All of a sudden, Elizabeth fell forcibly to the planks with an angry *thud*. Her head drilled the floor *hard*.

The sudden impact jolted her awake. She kicked wildly at the entangled covers at her feet … then fell to convulsions. Grace woke with a start and hugged her knees, petrified.

Elizabeth Knapp shook as one shivering in the cold before the seizure stilled at last. When it ended, she rose to her feet and turned to face the burning hearth.

Samuel had awoken at the noise. He hurried down the stairwell and into the bedchamber. Abigail trailed behind. The children roused and appeared sleepily at their doors, wondering.

When Samuel flung the door open, he was aghast at the sight. He saw Elizabeth walking dazedly toward the fireplace, her white shift aglow with tawny shades. Samuel called aloud, but his cry went unheeded. Elizabeth

was spellbound. She could hear his voice, but it sounded far away, like an echo from the depths of a cave.

Elizabeth walked on. She moved steadily across the hearthstones, unharmed by the heat beneath her heels. Transfixed, she seemed bent on taking her life. A self-murder in the making.

“ELIZABETH!” Samuel cried again, more desperate this time.

The fire danced as she drew ever closer. Smoke rose. The flames snapped like whips until it licked her nightclothes, and she caught fire.

Horrified, Samuel leapt forward, reaching for her shoulder.

Elizabeth, sensing his nearness, whipped around, whacked his hand away, and buried her fists into his chest with one swift motion.

Surprised by the force of her blow, Samuel staggered backward. It felt as though an anvil had struck his rib cage, hard as iron.

Samuel recovered and charged again. Elizabeth stood unmoved. It seemed as if he had run up against a tree. When he clamped his arms around her, she flew into a red rage. Elizabeth tore his grip as if he was a child.

It should have been easier to apprehend her, much easier. Elizabeth was a yet a young one, and slight at that. However, she seemed empowered by a strength beyond her own, beyond her sixteen years. It seemed unusual, unnatural. Unhuman.

Abigail looked on nervously. When she realized Elizabeth couldn’t be won, she jumped into the mix. Elizabeth swatted her away like some annoying fly. A pest.

After a struggle, Samuel wrested her to the ground, away from the furnace. The two fell in a tangle of limbs. Samuel pinned her down with full might.

Elizabeth could feel the course wood scraping into her cheek. With ragged breaths, she huffed angrily through strands of straw hair, which fell shapeless across her face.

While Abigail swatted at the smoldering shift, Samuel pinned her until she finally stopped kicking and fell limp at last, smoke rising from her charred linen.

The struggle had lasted moments, yet it had felt eternal. It had been more strenuous than Samuel cared to admit.

When he climbed to his feet, he noticed the children standing at the doorway for the first time. They had witnessed it all. Their faces were drawn in a horrified wonder, wide-eyed and open-mouthed. Samuel Willard had spared Elizabeth's life, but at what cost?

Samuel was deeply troubled by Elizabeth's wish for death. *For what cause might she desire self-murder? 'Tis blasphemous, yea, and a great and unpardonable sin*. As minister, Samuel understood that to commit so heinous an act was worthy of hell. A certain doom.

There was one more thing that troubled Samuel—her eyes. The look in them was fierce and full of malice, revolt. It was a look he had never seen in anyone before. It spoke of ungodly hatred, capable of who knew what? In that moment, she was not the Elizabeth Knapp he knew. This Elizabeth was dangerous. Destructive. Disturbed. Elizabeth Knapp would soon show herself a force to be reckon with.

Samuel's harrowing account followed:

> *Afterwards (the same evening,) the rest of the family being in bed, she was (as one lying in the room saw, and she herself also afterwards related) suddenly thrown down into the midst of the floor with violence, and taken*

> *with a violent fit, whereupon the whole family was raised, and with much ado was she kept out of the fire from destroying herself …*[7]

Stupid.

That was what Elizabeth thought about her chores of late.

The details and duties she had performed so reverently, so submissively, she had since taken issue with. For her, they became meaningless, tedious, and stupid. She had trouble accomplishing them. And the growing sense of dissatisfaction within her was becoming intolerable. It ate at her like worms. As a matter of fact, the more she did, the more meaningless her chores became, Elizabeth found. It was as if she had lost all interest. It seemed the last thing in the world that the maid wanted was to please her reverend master, for some strange reason.

Half-hearted and disinterested, she performed her duties with all the vigor of a slug. Samuel's cows in the cow house were tended with hardly a care. *Stupid cows*. Fetching water from a nearby well became too tedious, too far. *Stupid buckets.* But it was chopping firewood that Elizabeth loathed most. To her, it was an unending, painstaking toil. It had driven her to the brink of exhaustion numerous times. Not to mention, the cold would crack and blister her hands whenever she wielded the axe. *Rather butcher a pig than split another piece of stupid timber on that stupid stump outside the home.*

It wasn't so much that she despised the work—she didn't, truly—but that she felt unusually tired lately, exhausted. Surely, it was hard work, but she was used to it and couldn't quite understand the reason for such tiredness. At times, she was overcome with a strange fatigue, a heaviness that could not easily be explained. It enveloped her as a blanket of wet

wool, made her lethargic, leaden. It drained her energy and clouded her thoughts. A dutiful maidservant, Elizabeth Knapp could never be mistaken as lazy. That would be untrue. Idle hands invited the devil, she was told. But even though she tried to work through the dense fog, she found it almost impossible to move from one task to the next. *What is the cause of such utter weariness?*

Her limbs were heavy. Eyelids, too. Sometimes, she felt she could fall asleep on her feet. Other times, the simplest tasks pained her. Sweeping, for instance. The broom might as well have been a brick in her hands. It was as if logs had been placed atop her. To her, it seemed abnormal to feel this tired, unnatural. Elizabeth thought it easier to chop wood than chop through her day. *A queer thought, truly*.

Elizabeth Knapp had no possessions to speak of. That reality haunted her at times, but lately, more and more, until it was almost too painful to consider. The thoughts bubbled up in her mind like water in a boiling kettle. The more she dwelled on her lack, the more her desires inflamed. Desires she kept locked as a secret sin. *What harm is there in a little extravagance, ease?* But whenever the thought arose, the next whipped it into the dark pit from whence it came. And colonial rule made certain it remained there. Luxuries such as silk, lace, wealth, and fine clothing were forbidden among the lesser classes. A crime. Sumptuary laws deemed these too lavish for those of Elizabeth's station to possess, too sumptuous. These things were reserved for the elite alone, of which Elizabeth Knapp was not, clearly. Colonists caught with such comforts faced a hefty fine. That said, there was no chance for Elizabeth to improve her lot in life, to obtain her truest wishes. No earthly way, anyhow.

Beneath her pleasant façade, Elizabeth hid a dark secret: she was woefully depressed, miserable. But you could never tell. She was caring

and friendly. Yet, although well-liked by peers, she couldn't escape the sense of despair she felt inside. It festered and gnawed at her like insects. She felt alone, isolated, discontented.

Elizabeth Knapp longed for an easier path. But no matter how she prayed and pleaded, nothing seemed to change. Ever. In fact, things only grew worse and worse. *God hath despised my prayers*.

Serving in the home of Reverend Samuel Willard only worked to enflame her growing desires, her envy. She secretly longed for the luxuries that came so easily to him; luxuries off limits to her, so said the law.

The thought nagged at her. It played repeatedly in her mind. And the underlying jealousies toward Samuel only made matters worse. It filled her with shame and guilt and resentment. Ugly feelings. Sinful. She knew it was wrong but seemed powerless to stop the ceaseless thoughts. Such desires were to be buried … buried deep down into the hole aching within her, never to see the light.

Whenever Elizabeth dreamed of better things, it was quickly pushed away by the next thought. The painful truth was this: Elizabeth Knapp, a common maidservant, could never have the kind of life that Samuel Willard lived. The two were worlds apart. While they shared the same roof, same church, the similarities ended there. Samuel Willard was a revered leader of the New World, a divine; Elizabeth was an average nobody. Samuel had a world of opportunities before him; when Elizabeth peered into her future, she saw black. Samuel was well-educated, a Harvard graduate; Elizabeth, like most girls, was unlearned. She could barely read or write. In fact, Elizabeth Knapp couldn't spell her own name, even if her life depended on it. The rift between them was clear … and was about to rip further apart.

> *... After which time she was followed with fits from thence till the sabbath day; in which she was violent in bodily motions, leapings, strainings and strange agitations, scarce to be held in bounds by the strength of 3 or 4. Violent also in roarings and screamings, representing a dark resemblance of hellish torments ...*[8]

Samuel's vision was correct. The torments were astonishing, eerie, violent. Over the next forty-eight hours, Elizabeth was struck with a series of inexplicable seizures that would last until Sabbath. *Afflictions*, Samuel called them. When he had first witnessed the strange convulsions, he had been gripped with a mixture of fear, awe, and confusion. So severe were the shakings that Samuel feared for her life. He wondered whether it was natural, or if something *other* was at work. Something he dared not name, not yet. He couldn't convince himself of the unthinkable, so he exorcised the thought from him mind … for now.

The blank stare omened the shakings. There was a pattern to them, Samuel saw.

First, her expression would fall and the grey-green gleam in her eyes dimmed. Next, she would appear dazed, senseless. Then came the seizures, those dreaded seizures. Each overtook her with shocking suddenness, each stronger than the next. Her body stiffened and trembled, as though lightning struck, electrified. Her eyes screwed shut. Her limbs jerked and twisted in a strange, awkward fashion, unnatural. The sharp, jagged motions appeared painful to Samuel. Lastly, she would fall to the ground and shake violently at length … until it subsided, and then her body remained corpse-stiff on the boards, speechless, misshapen. Dead still.

The sight was astonishing. A chill crept up his neck with each vision, or perhaps it was the cold in the room. Yet the seizures, although frightening, were not the true terror. Had that been all, Samuel might have ascribed it to some sickness. But it was the violent uproars between the fits that disturbed him most.

In those moments, Elizabeth became unhinged. On at least one occasion, she erupted into a red rage—volcanic, volatile, violent. Elizabeth tore through the home like a rabid beast, bursting with primal, savage screams, jumping and roaring as she lay waste to everything in her destructive path. The explosive outbursts seemed as if a dormant energy had been unleashed all at once. Pure fury.

Hell on earth.

Dread. That was how Samuel described her bombastic outrages. Still, it seemed too simple an explanation. It seemed something more than that. It seemed … *evil*. Elizabeth, in her state of unbridled rage, appeared to be … no, she *was* hell unleashed.

Once again, it fell to Samuel to restrain the madness. Him and four others. But that would not prove easy. Not this time. Her strength had grown more potent than before, beastly. The previous melee would seem horseplay to the power she now possessed.

Extraordinary. She was but a girl, but Elizabeth Knapp possessed the strength of six or more.

Elizabeth stood, defiant and hostile. One by one, she evaded their feeble attempts, broke their grips, and sent them reeling backward. *What manner of might is this?*

Time warped. How long the fracas lasted, nobody could tell. But it had ended with Elizabeth beneath a pile of bodies and twisted limbs. Who had tackled her wasn't exactly clear, either. Everything seemed a blur.

It was Wednesday when Elizabeth returned to her right mind, when she grew coherent. At least, coherent enough to hold a conversation. But while the seizures might have ceased for now, the repercussive effects on her mental state were evident. She was heartbroken, melancholy, and *sottish*, as though drunk. If she was glad the afflictions had passed, it didn't show on her sullen face. Elizabeth's misery was plain. It couldn't be hidden. She didn't even try.

Samuel had many concerns. He had hoped the respite would bring answers, but that had been wishful thinking on his part. He had encountered madness on a scale yet seen and wanted answers. Elizabeth's bizarre displays had threatened him, his family, and even herself … a true discovery was in order.

When Samuel saw that Elizabeth was cognizant, he questioned her at once. *Where to start?*

Elizabeth appeared shrunken somehow. She was melancholy, dejected, and defeated. A creature of ash and sorrow. She sat on her bed, fiddling with one of the children's straw dolls, as if she were a child herself.

What pained Elizabeth exactly? Samuel had his thoughts, but they were splintered and ricocheted like a musket shot against the walls of his mind. Was it an ailment? A spiritual matter? A secret sin? The work of local witches?

Samuel sprayed Elizabeth with questions. Sometimes, his queries appeared pastoral and empathetic. Others, he mirrored more a magistrate than a minister.

Are you well? What ails you? What is the reason for the afflictions? Did you suffer harm? Where you aware of the happenings? Do you recall anything? Are you injured? Did you feel any pain? It sure as hell looked it.

What enraged you? Where did the remarkable strength come from? What caused the seizures?

Oftentimes, his need for answers trumped his Christian charities and concerns. After all, he was a man of authority and duty and sought to discover the truth however necessary.

Art thou witched?

Elizabeth shook her head. Miserable, she twiddled nervously with the doll at her lap. Her silence was frustrating, maddening. When Elizabeth finally did speak, she fed Samuel one ridiculous excuse after another. But it was her final reason that was most troubling.

Samuel's brow crinkled as she relayed her twisted tale.

He chortled skeptically. "The chimney?" Samuel scoffed. "Madness! You daresay Hannah—*Hannah Barron*—ventured down the stack and did fly upon you with these *afflictions*?" Samuel tsked. "It was she who witched you?"

Elizabeth nodded gloomily, tears pooling in her eyes. She pulled at the doll's arm.

Samuel sighed with annoyance. "Do you take me a Merry Andrew? For mercy's sake, she is of sincere uprightness before God. More than most of your tribe, I might say. Speaketh carefully. You *know* the weight of thy words."

Weighty words indeed, Elizabeth knew full well. Such claims have been the ruin of many. Still, she said them, no matter the consequences. In her mind, the story made perfect sense. But the moment it left her lips, she realized how ridiculous it sounded when she accused her closest neighbor. An impeachment that could spell doom.

Elizabeth laced her claims with convincing truths. She described her supposed attacker in exact detail … mimicked her mannerisms … remarked

on her dress … and especially made certain to point out her blue riding hood, a touch too sumptuous, Elizabeth presumed. The accusation fumed with spite.

What did she claim exactly? In so many words, Elizabeth claimed that Hannah Barron—rather the devil in her likeness—had come down the chimney and tormented her. It was her specter that had caused the attacks; she her tormentor.

For Samuel Willard, the implication was stark, treacherous. In few words, Elizabeth had cruelly named her a witch, one in league with the devil. Hannah Barron, she intimated, was endued with spectral powers, a power bestowed only to witches, to those in service to Satan, the Grand Enemy of Mankind..

It was a vile charge. Incognito, the witch-specter was believed to assume the shape of Christian neighbors. Witches took their forms to inflict harm and tarnish their good names with malign deeds … all in an effort to defame the name of God. That said, Elizabeth had accused her neighbor of the most heinous crime in all the world—*witchcraft*.

More than Medieval superstition, witchcraft was a scourge on humanity, especially to the Christian cause. It was often the blame for various misfortunes: invisible tortures, sore woes, sickness, disease, injuries, crop failure, natural disasters, and even death—animal and human—were ascribed to the black arts. In the eyes of the law, witchcraft was doubly offensive. First, it was a curse against mankind. Second, blasphemy toward God. Because of its heinous effects on land and people, the commonwealth, in accordance with biblical law, held witchcraft a capital crime.

A death sentence.

Elizabeth had more than a rudimentary understanding of religion, even for her sex. She understood that God had an elect people … and that those whom the Father had chosen, the son redeemed. She understood there was another world. A heaven. A hell. She also knew about various concerns of the country. These, she learned from overhearing Samuel now and again. Moreover, Elizabeth understood the law.

But, was Elizabeth's story true? Was she truly the victim of a witch assault? Such things did occur, Samuel knew. He had heard the reports from other provinces on occasion. It wasn't that he didn't so much believe the tales … but that he had never seen it for himself. Not yet.

While strangely fascinating, he was careful to draw conclusions without sufficient evidence. Besides, this was Groton. Tiny, insignificant Groton. Encounters of the witch kind simply didn't happen here, did it?

But, was Hannah Barron, as Elizabeth intimated, a witch? As town minister, Samuel was obliged to search out the matter. He did not believe the accusations. Not for a moment. But … still … as God's chosen authority, he could not take the chance, whomever the suspect. The spiritual welfare of the town rested upon his shoulders. He could not allow witchcraft, in any form, to flourish in the commonwealth. Neither would he allow the country to groan under pernicious evil, nor the devil to destroy the *Beacon upon a Hill*. Not on his watch. It must needs be investigated, no matter how holy the suspect, or unholy. So, with that in mind, against his better judgment, Samuel summoned the accused for questioning.

When the Barron girl arrived and Samuel relayed the charges that Elizabeth had leveled against her, she reacted with shock, surprise, and hurt. Then fear. The news bit like a viper.-At first, she took offense … then grew incredulous … then her world turned black as the damning accusation registered in her mind. Metallic dread crept up her throat. She could taste it.

Her tummy somersaulted as she suddenly realized the unthinkable—Hanna Barron had become the target of a witch interrogation.

She felt sick. She might have wretched right then had she not believed Samuel knew her Christian virtue. But, what did that matter when it came to discovering a witch? Nothing. Nothing at all. Rather a whore than a witch. She knew it. God, she knew it. Elizabeth did, too.

Elizabeth made no apologies. She was unrelenting, dour. When the girl had first arrived, Elizabeth immediately reviled her with unspeakable insults and accusations, eyes squinched tight. Hannah Barron had hardly lowered her blue hood before the attacks had come. The unexpected assault had nearly stolen her breath. She had stood at the threshold with stunned surprise, wordless.

Strangely, Elizabeth had known it was her without seeing. Another preternatural sign, Samuel thought.

Reluctant and half-hearted, Samuel questioned the accused. Was she a witch, truly? Had she consorted with the Prince of Darkness? To know for certain, Hannah Barron must be tested a witch.

Whether to prove her innocence, or prove Elizabeth wrong, Samuel administered the Touch Test. The test was but one of several prescribed methods to detect a witch, detailed in Heinrich Kramer's *The Malleus Maleficarum—The Hammer of Witches*. The witch hunter's playbook, of sorts. It was also the tamest of all the often humiliating tests employed.

It worked like this: A witch's curse, it was believed, could only be removed by the one who had conjured the spell. If the condition ceased when touched, then that individual was indeed a witch. No reaction meant innocence. In this case, Hannah was ordered to touch Elizabeth, to see whether her afflictions might halt when touched. To no one's surprise, the "curse" did not return to Hanna Barron. She was faultless.

Samuel had enough. Afterward, he brought the folly to a close and pardoned the girl quickly, quietly. “Not a word of this to anyone,” he commanded.

Whether to keep the issue from authorities, or to shield the girls from rumor and scandal, little else was mentioned. The test had proven sufficient, clearing her of all guilt.

Grateful, Hannah Barron had been spared from shame and possible death.

Elizabeth grimaced at the outcome. Even so, there was one more startling detail Elizabeth had offered:

> *... shee yet knew her very touch from any other, though no voice were uttered, & discovered it evidently by her gestures, soe powerfull were Satan’s suggestions in her, yet afterward God was pleased to vindicate the case & justifye the innocent, even to remove jealousyes from the spirits of the party concerned, & satisfaction of the by standers; for after shee had gon to prayer with her, shee confessed that she beleeved Satan had deluded her, & hath never since complained of any such apparition or disturbance from the person.*[9]

Had Elizabeth been deceived of Satan, as she said?

Such a claim, at this point, was too murky for Samuel to resolve.

Once Hannah took leave, Samuel again turned to Elizabeth. But the maid grew distant and evasive with her answers.

Elizabeth deflected his questions with silly excuses and juvenile remarks, pinning the blame on others, or whoever entered the room. She

proved elusive. Clearly, there was nothing more to be gained this day.

Elizabeth Knapp, as a stubborn child, would neither own her behavior, nor reveal the true cause of her afflictions. That would take place the following Thursday evening … when she offered the darkest revelation to date:

> *On Thursday night, shee brake forth into a large confession in the presence of many, the substance whereof amounted to thus much: That the devill had oftentimes appeared to her …*[10]

Black. So black was her admission that it choked those gathered with fear and horror.

"I … I have seen the devil," Elizabeth told the party. "He has oftentimes appeared unto me. Yea, for … three … three years he hast now come." She glanced sidelong at Samuel, and then to the fires dancing in the hearth. After a brief pause, she continued, "At first, his visitations were more rare. But then he discovered himself more frequent. Now evermore. Since I have come to dwell here. Scarce do I go out of one room into another without his appearing. With every coming, he offers money and silks and lace, and such fine clothes that it be not lawful for me to wear. He promised to shew me the whole world and ease for my labors. All I could ever wish." Elizabeth hesitated with fear before giving her next statement. "He showed me a treaty … and demanded I write my name in his book."

The Devil's Book. Witches swore it existed. It was a common confession among witch suspects. The large red book, with heavy iron clasps, was a thing of legend and intrigue. Lore or no, it was a wonder to most everyone. Each blood-marked parchment meant a pact made with the

devil, a covenant. Poor souls signed the contracts with their own blood in exchange for various favors, powers, pleasures, or monetary gains.

While it seemed absurd that such a thing could exist, it was held true, as Cotton Mather would later affirm during the Salem witch scare, still decades off, saying, “Yea, more than one hundred and twenty have confessed that they have signed unto a book, which the devil showed them, and engaged in his hellish design of bewitching and ruining our land.”[11]

Take condemned witch, Rebecca Greensmith, for instance. Along with plotting against one Anne Cole, a sincere Christian, she had confessed to numerous witch crimes. By her own admission, she had held witch meetings in the woods, conjured the devil, and even had repeated sexual trysts with the Dark Lord. But when she declared her love of him and signed his accursed book, it sealed her fate. Rebecca Greensmith was charged with entertaining familiarity with Satan. She was executed on January 25, 1663, at Hartford, Connecticut.

Heavy silence filled the room. Dread … Blatant dread. It was as though something had sucked the air clear out.

When Elizabeth drew up her eyes, she was met with horrid stares, appalled, terrified. One turned chalk-white and fled the room. Others struggled to comprehend the grim revelation, as though it was a dream, as though it had not truly been spoken.

Samuel drank in the words. Those detestable words. They tasted blacker than sin. Their weight fell upon him like gravity. A rush of heat. It prickled his skin like fiery needles, dark and dreary. A river of emotions flooded him at once—concern, fear, confusion, awe, empathy, hope, hopelessness and, again, fear. But the fear was not for himself. It was for Elizabeth, for the grim, lightless path that lay ahead of her should this course continue.

For a moment, Samuel was stunned silent. Maybe longer. He chewed on her confession for some time as he searched for the words. At last, he spoke. His voice grew low and grim, thick with concern.

"This is a very grave thing you speaketh," he said. "If this be true, you *know* you will be— *Hanged.* Samuel stopped short of announcing her sentence, as he suddenly realized the captive audience gawking with dumb surprise.

Wide-eyed and pale, it was as if they had seen a ghost. No—*a witch*.

"Begone. All. Forthwith!" Samuel lowered his eyes, pointing at their faces. "And telleth not a soul of the matter."

One by one, they peeled off, afraid to stay, afraid to leave.

When the room emptied, Samuel addressed his maid. "The devil? For what cause would he take aim at thee?"

Elizabeth shook her head.

"In what form does he appear? What does he wear?"

Elizabeth fell stone silent.

"Have you set thy hand to *the book*?"

The maid hung her head. She then doubled over and wept bitterly into her hands. "O, I am truly unprofitable," she cried. "I am full of infirmities and wants and sin. I have disobeyed my parents … forsaken the meeting and despised the Holy Sabbath, and the fasting days. My spirit is as barren as the trees, and a fountain of corruption is deep within my nature. There remains no good fruit in me. I am condemned!" Elizabeth could taste the salted tears. She begged for forgiveness and prayer.

While moving and heartfelt, Samuel ignored the teary pleas and pressed her more forcefully.

"Elizabeth, have you familiarity with Satan?"

“I-I … Master Willard, my labors … On my immortal soul, I pray it not so. How should I suffer to live with such corruptness?” With that, Elizabeth collapsed into heap of misery. She wept until her throat ran dry and hoarse, and nothing more could be said, or discovered.

Idle hands are the devil’s tools. Even the village idiot knew that. While hard work was praised, idleness was despised. A mortal sin. As a matter of fact, certain legislation served to keep citizens productive. But in the case of Elizabeth Knapp, the opposite might have been true. She had more work than she could handle, she felt. Probably too much. And when her labors grew too taxing to bear, she grew despondent and despised her days. If Elizabeth’s confession was to be trusted, it would not be her hands that welcomed the devil, but unhappiness.

Under colonial law, citizens were expected to work at jobs according to their born social status. And remain there. For example, ministers, legislators, and merchants belonged to the upper rungs of society; Farmers, artisans, and fisherman, the lower rungs. One born of modest means, like Elizabeth Knapp, was virtually forbidden to better their financial status. Therefore, Elizabeth would exhaust all her days as a servant, nothing more. To become anything other would take a force of wonder.

Elizabeth sensed the warmth of a gaze on her back. Ever since her profession, she sensed invisible eyes following her every move. The uneasy feeling she felt was at last proven true when the devil appeared in the flesh. He came out of the blue while Elizabeth was sweeping the common room one cold morning. The room was empty, she thought, when he first appeared. Whether he came from thin air or passed through the wall, she was never quite certain. How it was possible, she knew not. At any rate, he made his presence known … and his demands clear with his midnight-sea stare.

Let it awaken you … Let it shew you the great danger you go in every hour of being made a prey …

The attacks grew uglier the second time around, more twisted.

On Friday, Elizabeth rose before dawn to prepare the morning fires. In the quiet cold, she swept and shoveled the hearth before kindling fresh logs from the dwindling corner pile. The flames grew rich and ruddy, and soon, the room danced with a tangerine glow and sounded with a comforting crackling, clearing the chill from the air. The smokey oaken scent was Samuel's usual morning wake-up call.

Elizabeth had returned from gathering sticks outside when Samuel appeared from upstairs. He was dressed in a dark riding cloak, hat in hand. It was black, wide-brimmed, and fashioned with a side buckle. He went before the hearth to warm himself before heading out.

He was somewhat surprised to find her working as normal and glanced at her suspiciously as she set the faggot near the hearth.

"I must call on the doctor on your behalf. Doctor Edwards," he announced his plans, affixing the hat to his head. "See to your chores. I will return on the morrow."

But I am well, she almost dared. Instead, she choked back the words, gave a polite nod, and wished him good travels. With a forced smile, she then clapped the debris from her hands and wiped the soot on her apron, trying her best to appear normal. Only, nothing *was* normal. And whatever ailed her, Samuel was determined to find out, whatever the case.

Soon after, Samuel rode off on horseback. Elizabeth could hear the hoofbeats trotting off into the distance as she poked at the flames.

The house grew alive past sunrise. Abigail arose to start the day, while the children began to mill about. She put a kettle on the cookfire, and then

suckled little Mary at her teat. The children were ordered to various chores, but instead chased one another through the home, playing, squealing.

The devil finds mischief for idle hands to do.

Elizabeth busied herself with sweeping. She had planned to scour the floors when finished … when the tremors suddenly struck. In an instant, the broom fell from her fingers, landing with a thin, woody *tap, tap.* Elizabeth landed with a clumsy *thud*.

Once again, Samuel had left the home, and once again, Elizabeth Knapp had fallen to fits in his absence.

The seizures came in fits and starts; some short, some long. But each struck with thrashing intensity. She shook violently, her limbs rigor mortis. Helpless, Elizabeth thrashed about the floor like an eel out of water. She flailed until the grip lost hold, only to strike with greater severity moments later. Between bouts, she lay breathlessly, staring blankly into some starless twilight until the next attack.

On one occasion, while in a quiet stupor, Elizabeth stood slowly. Her eyes screwed upward, empty. Flashes of red-gold flame filled her stare with a malevolent gleam. She grew tight. Her arms contracted and made a sharp rotating motion. Her hands joined behind her back, wrist to wrist. She began to mutter something indistinguishable under her breath, her lips working inaudibly.

That was how Samuel found the maid the following day.

When he first returned, Abigail raced to meet him, out of breath. He had barely unhorsed before she broke into the barn, rattled and racked with anxiety, fear and worry laced in her eyes. She had not slept, it seemed.

With animated motions, she explained nervously what had happened and urged him into the home.

Inside, Samuel found Elizabeth standing at the opposite corner of the room, near the hearthstones. Her hair was exposed. It hung in stringy, dirty-blonde strands. Her white coif lay crumbled at her feet, pulled off in revolt.

The fire was near extinguished. It had gone untended all night. Only a pulsating, orange glow beneath charred cinder remained. None dared near the hearth, near Elizabeth.

'Tis colder than ice in here. Samuel moved toward the maid, who seemed frozen in her strange posture, blue lips working soundlessly. Samuel approached with curious caution.

"Elizabeth, thou hear me?"

When she gave no answer, he addressed Abigail, "What is she saying?"

Abigail made an unknowing gesture. "What do you make of her?" she asked, sweeping her hair off her forehead with shaky fingers. "She hast been muttering all night until now." Her earthy voice sounded anxious and irritated.

"Methinks some extraordinary illness," he said while trying to make the words. "Epilepsy perhaps … or moonstruck, or—"

"*Witched*," Abigail interjected harshly.

The suggestion struck him like a hammer against an anvil.

Samuel did not discredit her accusation outright, but gave a stern warning. He turned sharply. "Speaketh not with such haste. If the rulers hear of it, there shall without doubt be an inquisition. Poor creature shall be stained all her life—or *worse*."

"Look upon her, Samuel," Abigail insisted. "The girl is *witched*. Thine own eyes do see it. I am affright at what she might do. To us. The *children.* Something is amiss.*"*

"The girl is but a young one. A twig." He motioned toward the bundle of sticks.

"Twig. I want her removed away from here. Pray thee, forthwith. She is not to be trusted, I fear."

"Doctor Edwards shall arrive come Sabbath. He shall discover the truth of it."

If Abigail was comforted by that, it didn't show in her sour expression. She left the room in an angry huff, leaving Samuel alone with the twisted, mumbling scarecrow of a maid.

He studied her a while longer. He searched his thoughts for answers, but every avenue drew a blank. Was it for pretense? Could it be a young girl's cry for attention? Help.

As Samuel conjectured in vain, a noise was heard. It was faint at first, hardly audible. It came in the form of words … a whispery muttering, then growing louder and more discernable until the words of Elizabeth Knapp rang clear.

"Money, money, money … Sin and misery… *MONEY*, *MONEY!"* She repeated the expression over and again, endlessly… until the spell unhanded her and the strange utterances silenced several hour later.

Afterwards, Samuel wasted little time in his search for answers. Part of him wanted a true confession, something—anything—that would make sense of the madness. Another part feared what might be conjured should he keep digging.

Under questioning, Elizabeth was sullen and withdrawn. Despite her *illucid* wanderings, one fear cut through the fog of her mind, an inescapable gloom. One that plagued witch suspects the world over. One that led countless souls to the gallows, the stakes. One she had secretly imagined for Hannah Barron.

Elizabeth wiped her nose. The clear slime smeared along the back of her palm. "Will you put me to the test?" she asked, sniffling and worried.

“Speak the truth; art thou a witch?”

“I have two teats only, and none more to suckle the devil’s foul creatures,” she answered. “You shall find no witch marks on my body.”

“If you be not a witch, then what have you to fear?”

“They shall hang me for a blemish,” Elizabeth argued. “A stupid *mole*. Pray thee, how many murdered for the very cause?”

“You mock God’s rulers?” He gave her a sharp look. Then an understanding passed across his face, and his gaze softened a little. “Abroad? Hundreds. Thousands. Who could count? They burn in Europe, thou knowest.”

Elizabeth shied from his stare. A black heat crept up the nape of her neck.

Samuel studied her uncertainly for a long moment before saying, “Tell me true; have you consented to a bargain?”

“I am no witch,” she blurted, a bit too harshly for Samuel’s liking. “I have not so much as agreed to speak with him.”

“If that is true, who then did you address with such bold exaggeration in the cellar with: ‘*What cheer old man”*?”

“I have never before spake such words,” she insisted. “All his apparitions made me affright, and I screamed. The providence of God ordered it so.” And then she quickly added, “The devil put the excuses into my mouth and bid me to speak them.” Elizabeth grew frustrated and fell to weeping. “Am I to be tested or no?” she asked between sobs. She wiped the tears with the back of her pale hand.

So, which was it: God or the devil? The contradiction was not lost on Samuel. Nevertheless, he decided not to press the issue. Too hard, and she may fall to pieces, more than she had already, or shut up like a steel trap.

Mining for answers was proving difficult enough, and last he needed was for her to grow more cryptic, or worse, silent.

After a long and thoughtful pause, he answered, “I thinketh not. No need to suffer the shame. I have seen no familiars or strange animals scurrying hither and thither for witching. Take comfort, your teats are secure, for the time.”

Elizabeth breathed a sigh of relief. But there were more questions in need of answering.

At length, Elizabeth had settled one of Samuel’s most nagging curiosities—did she know what happened while in her fits?

Simply, yes. While she appeared to be in a stupefied, arthritic blackout, Elizabeth remained fully aware of her surroundings, she told. She was conscious throughout her fits. In fact, her senses seemed keener than usual, she added. Regardless of her pitiful state, she could hear and sense everything, even with her eyes screwed shut. Elizabeth even repeated what had been said in her hearing.

I want her removed away from here.

That stung.

When questioned about her hysterical laughter, she said it was feigned, forced. That admission caused further confusion on Samuel’s part, as it seemed strangely authentic. A lie, perhaps. There was more. Another stone turned when Samuel addressed her mutterings about money, sin, and misery.

“The devil sore tempts me with money,” she explained. “And should I refuse his callings, he threatens sin and misery … to terrify me. He did open to me the sorrows of hell, and all the devils I did see, in all their hellish shapes. More devils than there ever were men in the world. He told me all would fall upon me, if I did not enter a bargain with him.”

It was a bitter medicine to swallow. Poison. It sounded implausible, unimaginable. It sounded horrific.

Could such a thing be true? Perhaps some medical explanation could make sense of it all … But, what? Samuel found it almost too outrageous to consider. Even so, Elizabeth's admission, wretched as it was, had a tenor of truth to it. The details were spoken so plainly, so believably, that Samuel could not simply brush it off. Where the truth lay, he could only guess. He didn't have to wait long for an answer, of sorts.

November ye 5th, a Sabbath.

The physician arrived.

Doctor Thomas Edwards was an impressive figure. Sturdy and proud-chested, he had black eyes and brown-blond hair, streaked with grey, to his shoulders. In his rich, sanguine cloak and white-laced neckcloth, the physician appeared as stately as they come, a gentleman. Learned and reputed, the good doctor was lauded on both sides of the Atlantic for his skills. And like most learned men, there was a certain dignity about him. The renowned medic had practiced among Boston's elite for most of his career.

He arrived as quickly as he could. Some three weeks had passed since the strange symptoms had first appeared, and he was curious to see Elizabeth for himself.

After pleasantries were exchanged, Samuel ushered him to the back chamber where Elizabeth was lying abed, curled fetal and half-asleep. The physician lowered his head to avoid hitting the frame as he entered.

The room was cramped, cold, and gloomy, lit only by the coals of a small hearth.

The doctor called for a candle, and soon, Abigail appeared with a pair of glowing lanterns. One she handed to the doctor, the other to Samuel.

He raised it high. Queer shadows filled the room. At the same time, the graceless Grace Whitney fed sticks to the hearth. A cock crowed in the distance.

Samuel gave a nod, and the maid squeezed from the room, only to return seconds later to retrieve her cap. With unsteady hands, she affixed it to her head, nervously tucking her tresses beneath the folds as she fled the room.

Elizabeth woke from the bustling around her. She sat upright and pulled her knees to her chest. Drawing the covers to her chin, she warily glanced about the room, confused. Her eyes were red and swollen, still caked with stale tears, her straw hair a tousled nest. But it was the large figure that confused her most.

When Samuel explained to Elizabeth that she was to be examined by the physician, she protested.

“But I am well now,” she insisted. “There is no more trouble upon my spirits. Satan has left me.”

Her objections went unheard.

Doctor Edwards set to work quickly. Looming over her, lantern in hand, he leaned in for a closer look. Shadows fled across her face, and her pale features alighted in the flickering glow. Flame and flecks of grey-green danced in her eyes.

The doctor began by prying her eyes wide for a look. Next, he searched her mouth and throat. Then he prodded here and there, where the pain first occurred, at her legs, chest, and neck. If he had any alarm, Samuel couldn’t tell. Truth be told, he remained rather blank-faced during his evaluation. All the while, making agreeable sounds as he ruled out ailments in his thoughts,

one by one. *Epilepsy, nay ... Phrenetic Melancholy ... Dropsy ... Ergot poisoning.* It was none. Neither was it any other known diseases of astonishment. Samuel stirred, curious.

"Will you be needing to drink her urine?"

"No, no," the doctor said, slightly amused. He straightened and pushed a shock of hair behind his right ear. "Thoughts are changing at the universities of late."

"A jest, for certain."

"Not in the least. The course of examinations are today illumined by reason. And education, of course. The ailments, as your poor maid does exhibit, are not the cause of superstitions or preternatural forces, or spooks, if that's what you suppose."

Samuel took slight offense. "Very well. There then must be *some* explanation rather than … *spooks*."

"Just so. Why 'tis all relatively common. What the maid suffers stems from foulness of stomach … wherefore added to the corruptness of her blood. Hence created fumes in her brain, which did, in turn, induce the strange fancies. None to worry." Doctor Edwards grasped the lapels of his cloak, pleased with his explanation.

Abigail bristled. "And what of the roarings? *She*—"

"Is in proper hands," Samuel broke in. "Continue."

"This could be remedied in hardly a time," he voiced. "With fumes of hartshorn, or some *physicke*, and a bit of bedrest, of course."

Of course. *There it is*. The doctor had spoken with such assurance that hardly another reason could exist. It had to be true. Must be true. The physician said as much.

Doctor Edwards went on to assure them that Elizabeth's condition was not all that uncommon but rather natural, that there was no real cause for

alarm or concern.

With that, Samuel grew relieved, Abigail doubtful, and Elizabeth apathetic. Still, despite the good report, something still seemed amiss. More than anything, Samuel wanted to believe it true, but the faint hint of unease kept him from being fully convinced. He hid his doubt, hoped for the best, and feared the worst. But this was only the doctor's initial diagnosis.

For the next week, Doctor Edwards frequented the home to treat Elizabeth. Under his care, she had made some visible improvements. The medication seemed to take effect somewhat, just as he had said. Before long, the seizures grew less frequent, less volatile. The bedrest did her good, too. The mild shakings were to be expected, the doctor pointed out. And if the brief period of remission was any sign of promise, a return to health was in clear view. The doctor held high hopes.

Had it not been for Elizabeth's lost stare and drunken speech, she would have been fit for chores. But that only happened at night, and could simply be an adverse reaction to the medication. *Of course*.

"She shall be made whole soon enough," the doctor avowed. "A full recovery is most assured."

Samuel was unassured.

The doctor was mistaken. The seizures returned. For days, Elizabeth suffered periodic tremors, some quieter than others. While most were slight, the more intense spells caused her to faint. Adolescent and oblivious, Elizabeth was naïve toward the true nature of her condition. She was not awakened to the peril she was in.

Elizabeth often argued that she was no longer ill, that no further care was needed. But the lasting fits spoke otherwise. Under the strange spells, her legs would give way, and she would sink to the floor in a grotesque, paralytic form, twitching, jerking, stiffening, frothing at the mouth. In the

end, she looked like a branch torn from its tree after a storm, her half-bent, half-dead form sprawled across the floor, laying half on her side.

In response, Samuel kept a day of solemn prayer on her behalf. It was all he could think to do, especially while the doctor was away. Reverend Samuel Willard prayed and prayed and prayed, then prayed more. He endlessly entreated—begged—God Almighty for understanding. Prayed for Elizabeth's healing and deliverance. Prayed for guidance. Prayed for some morsel of hope. More importantly, he prayed for answers; anything that might shed light on the situation … *something*.

Nothing. No answer fell from heaven, that he could tell. In truth, it seemed, the more he prayed, the worse things became. Elizabeth's spasms grew stronger and more frequent. He wondered whether his petitions had vanished into some dark void in the sky. *My Lord, dost thou at all hear my petitions?* Still, he prayed like no tomorrow until his words and tongue grew silent. Same as Elizabeth's.

Quiet. Samuel woke to the thought early one morning. The home was awkwardly still. He didn't hear Elizabeth stirring or at her chores—the usual scraping sounds of shovel on stone as she cleared ashes from the hearth below. But when Samuel didn't smell the morning fires, he grew suspicious. Then it hit him.

The silence, it was not the golden kind, but the kind that signaled the children were up to some sort of mischief. If felt like that, felt eerie.

Samuel felt moved to look after Elizabeth. No man could ever name Samuel Willard a coward. The son of an English army captain and statesman, he was anything but. Far from it. Nonetheless, something about entering Elizabeth's chamber that morning made him uneasy.

He padded down the stairs and turned into the common room. He was surprised to find Grace preparing the hearth for the fires, half-buried inside.

She gave him a horrid stare as he moved past.

The door was cracked open, its edges lit by a faint, failing glow. What lay behind that door, he couldn't say for certain. *Spooks* … the doctor's voice haunted his thoughts as he neared.

Samuel slid one arm across the length of the door and edged it open slowly. It widened with a sullen *creak*. Peering inside, he found Elizabeth standing stone-still at the center of the room. She was still dressed in her nightclothes, and her hair was unpinned, limp, disheveled. She appeared half-frozen, crooked, and as pale as yesterday's ashes. Her head was tilted back, angled slightly right, eyes gazing sightlessly. Her seemingly double-jointed limbs contorted into painfully awkward positions, like sticks broken in two. Her knotted fingers reminded Samuel of the branches she would gather for the flames.

He had seen this before. What he hadn't seen was Elizabeth's tongue curled into a semi-circle inside her mouth, arching backward as if she meant to swallow it whole. It was rigid, tough as iron, and clung to the roof of her mouth. The taut, thin vein running beneath was a cold, sickly blue.

Samuel was stunned. A mix of emotions flooded him at once—shock and marvel, curiosity and concern. The fear, he tried to stifle.

He stood absently for a moment, taking in the strange sight. *Great God, what is this?*

Elizabeth was perfect in her deformity. A sick centerpiece. It was as if she had been placed there on purpose, a macabre trophy put on display for him alone to find. A taunt. A warning. A threat.

He made a desperate move toward the bent maid. Up close, her face seemed a ghoulish death mask, eyes as empty sockets. Astonished, Samuel glanced at her frame then hooked a finger between her cheeks and attempted to free her tongue. It felt dry and tough, like an old root. It would

not budge. It was stuck there, locked tighter than a secret between her jowls. Samuel made several vain efforts to dislodge it, to no avail. It refused to break loose, no matter how many tries.

A still tongue keepeth a wise head.

The maid remained rooted in place for hours. As did her tongue. It was only a short time before others learned of her strange state, and themselves attempted to liberate the speechless maid. Regardless of who tried, none could unbolt her tongue. Not Samuel. Not Elizabeth's friends. Certainly not Abigail. The goodwife would have nothing to do with her at this point. Not even Doctor Edwards, who later came to check on her progress, or lack thereof. When Samuel enquired about her latest developments, the doctor muddled off a few jargon-laced explanations, but none that made much sense. *Does he now grasp at straws?*

The sun had set when Elizabeth's tongue loosed at last, uncurled. For an incredible five days, Wednesday through Sunday, she was rendered speechless.

Released from the cruel conjuration, Elizabeth collapsed into a spat of bitter tears, as she had done after each prior episode. But it was her continuous self-condemnations that proved a greater bitterness. Tormented, dejected, and depressed, Elizabeth again bemoaned her pathetic existence. Awash in her own sense of worthlessness, she anguished over how useless she felt, complained about her carelessness toward spiritual matters, lamented the many ways she had failed her parents, and despised her sins.

Once again, the grief had altered her appearance somehow. The hard edges vanished from her face, and what remained seemed more like a helpless child than a budding juvenile. She appeared a girl half her age and twice as hopeless.

“I am a worthless creature,” she bemoaned. “Nothing more matters. There remains no hope for me.”

After her woeful speeches, Elizabeth pleaded for prayer. But, were her appeals earnest? They sounded sincere enough, but Samuel couldn’t tell for certain. *She does weepeth, yea, but are they tears of a crocodile?*

Samuel was ill-prepared for what was next.

The following night, after much of the same embittered remorse, Elizabeth gave her most daunting confession yet. It came after Samuel had questioned her for a time. At first, she had been reluctant and dismissive, but then something changed. Elizabeth, for whatever reason, suddenly grew chatty. Whether to unburden her soul, confess sins, or end the sufferings, Samuel could not tell. It mattered not. She was talking.

Samuel wanted just one thing—*the truth*. And in a stroke of Providence, as it pleased God to settle his thoughts, Elizabeth Knapp offered another addition to her already twisted tale.

Careful to not interrupt, Samuel gave a ready ear as Elizabeth began cautiously, and then the words tumbled unashamedly.

“I … I have traveled with the devil. Twice … to Lancaster.” Elizabeth watched for his response, to which he crossed his arms. Only with his eyes did he say, *Continue.* She did.

“He shewed himself as a dog. A black one. With eyes on its back. On both journeys, I followed on my horse whilst he led the way. Sometimes, he would stop the beast as we went, and sometimes, he would leap beside me or come leaping from behind. And when I did enter again the town, if there was any company around, he would go before about forty rods, as to not arouse suspicions. Once, somewhere between here and Lancaster, he drew me off course and into a bog, alone, where he became a man. How it was possible, I know not. One moment he was a dog—a *black dog*—and next …

a man. He held a great red book in his hand. There, he did argue with me over a compact and demanded I set my hand to his book, else he would kill me."

Ridiculous. Ridiculous but perhaps true, Samuel reasoned. The story rang equally bizarre and disturbing. But, was there a kernel of truth to it? Samuel suspected there was.

He buried his skepticism and continued to question the maid.

"Elizabeth, is this true?"

Elizabeth nodded, glancing at the floor.

"Who else have you told of this matter?"

"None."

"Did you make a pact with the devil?"

"Master Willard, I am unlearned in my letters," she reminded. "You know it well enough."

Elizabeth was right. He knew it full well. As part of the agreement between he and James Knapp, it was his responsibility to teach Elizabeth to read and write. Something that did not come easy to Elizabeth. The ink was messy, and whenever she put quill to parchment, the letters never formed correctly. At times, Samuel had to guide her hand with his own to form the strokes.

"Was there then a verbal treaty agreed upon?" he asked. "The bond holds true all the same, thou knowest."

"Better I bargain with the horse." Elizabeth was repulsed. "I denied him my name, and now he punishes me for it. This is his main quarrel with me … the true cause of the torments. Pray thee, I did not write my name in his *cursed book*." Elizabeth was adamant. Her eyes flashed with what seemed revolt, or was it respite?

Her explanation seemed convincing enough. If it was an act, then Samuel was the town fool. When he had seen how firmly she stood behind her account, how matter-of-fact her speech, his opinion was swayed. Samuel had never taken her for a liar. Far as he knew, she had always dealt respectfully with him, liked him well enough. He had little reason to think otherwise. However, Elizabeth did give serious consideration to signing *the book*, she admitted.

"But only to end the sufferings."

Let it awaken you … Let it shew you the great danger you go in every hour …

November ye 26th.

It was a day of astonishment. Torment.

It seemed, the more Elizabeth confessed, the worse she suffered. Although Elizabeth had endured prior fits, none had tormented her half as much as on that following Lord's day. So terrible were the tremors that Samuel thought she might die. Moreover, he feared for those who came to visit her that day—a handful of concerned, and morbidly curious, colleagues and, especially, Dr. Edwards, who showed to check on his patient's worsening progress, to his dismay.

The fits crashed upon the maidservant like angry waves of a storm-tossed sea—vicious, cruel. Unlike past molestations, there was certain violence to them, an evil yet seen. Elizabeth quivered and quaked like never before. And as she did, the room thickened with a sense of uncertainty, peril. Was it possible that this was revenge for her latest confession? It seemed something inside her woke.

Something dark.

Dangerous.

It awoke and surfaced like some unleashed creature beneath the sea, taking vengeance on the one who enraged it. Unholy wrath.

Elizabeth shook and shook and shook. With eyes squinched, her bones clattered within her frame, like the rattling of dice in one's hand. Her brain knocked against the plates of her skull. The vision made Samuel think of a rattle in the hand of some terrible giant. A plaything. *For how long could she suffer such madness?*

She would die right then and there, Samuel was sure of it. Only, she didn't. Instead, the violent spasms ended abruptly, and she and the room grew eerily still.

The terrible silence lasted but a moment … until Elizabeth's eyes suddenly popped wide open, and she launched into a howling rage. Elizabeth bellowed a shrill, throaty war cry, louder than any Indian that Samuel had ever heard. Long and anguished, it pealed with dread, defiance, and something … something wicked. It wended long and tapered with a heart-rending sigh. So god-awful was the howl that Samuel thought her heartstrings might break. *What witchery is this?*

She looked demonized. Her neck veins bulged. Her eyes burned with malice. Deep scorn and sharp lines etched her chalky features, shaded red by the fury, fists balled tight at her sides.

At the same time, an unsettling feeling fell upon the room, a presence. It was invisible yet evident. It charged with anger and hatred and blackness. Evil. It set Samuel on edge and others affright. None were safe now, namely Elizabeth.

Aghast, Abigail hurried the children upstairs and locked themselves away in a bedchamber, their little faces shaped with horrified wonder. Samuel shivered, cold. Dread stole the doctor's speech. Astonished, his

eyes were as wide as plates. His mouth opened and closed, as if to frame words that never came.

Elizabeth erupted. She exploded like a powder keg, and in an instant, the room turned to chaos. Frenzied and craze-filled, the maid became a missile of deadly force. For a third time, Elizabeth ripped through the home like an uncaged beast, leaping and skipping, yelling and roaring, menacing and destroying. Elizabeth Knapp had become a thing of fright.

Elizabeth spilled the heavy oak trestle table, heaving it across the room with brute strength. Shocked, Samuel watched as it skidded and scraped across the floorboards.

Faggots, next attack the faggots.

She tossed the wooden bundle into the air with a special vengeance, sniggering as the sticks landed and rebounded with the woody clatter of falling candlepins. Elizabeth then turned her focus on the hearth. Tearing the black iron kettle from its place, she hurled it against the back of the hearth. Cooked peas, onions, and pork spattered the wall. The ingredients oozed down the charred bricks in pale green clumps, as the kettle landed with a hollow metal *clang* amid the ashes. Incredibly, she was unburnt by its heat, Samuel saw.

Great God, help us all.

Before the mouth, Elizabeth whirled and spied the room. It was as though she recognized the company for the first time. She counted five … five poor fools who she could spend her wrath upon. Through narrowed eyes, she glared at the small audience, sizing up her victims.

Fear, it gripped all. God help whosoever dared to cross her path. But dare they did.

Elizabeth vaulted from before the opening and danced between the fallen sticks. When she did, a gangly girl with black hair and a brown

petticoat made a reach for her. She missed. Elizabeth did not. She answered with a wad of spit that caught the girl square in the face.

The clear slime blurred her vision and sent her stumbling over the branches, falling awkwardly to the floor, injuring her arm.

Slut! Elizabeth chided with a mocking, almost playful laugh.

Another, a boy of thirteen, suffered a similar consequence. He had a fleshy face with bright blond hair and blue eyes. Only his failed charge ended with a sour wail as his back cracked hard against the stairwell wall. Elizabeth, seizing him by the shoulders, had twice shoved him with cruel force. His head hammered and bounced off the wall, sending his floppy, tan hat to the boards, his body to the sticks. The boy's blue breeches darkened at the front, spreading in an uneven butterfly pattern down the woolen fabric. Elizabeth tittered deliciously at the sight.

Elizabeth spun again. In a shrieking, reckless rage, she leapt over the sticks and bounded toward the hearth until she felt something hard and fleshy smack against her face, stopping her dead. Her face planted squarely in the physician's broad chest. He clutched her, but she broke his grip, took a quick step back, and sank her palms firmly into his chest.

Foolish quack! Elizabeth railed as she shoved him with uncanny force. Her blow felt like steel against his heart. Dr. Edwards winced and went stumbling, stumbling backward into the glowing hearth. His balance failed, and he landed with a heavy *thud* atop the heated hearthstones. Puffs of cinder billowed at the clumsy fall, hiding him behind a thin veil of ashy dust. At his back, the charred logs spilled with a wooden crackling sound, sending auburn sparks and grey-white smoke through the chute. Scorched, the scornful heat at his palms prickled like a thousand fiery needles.

Samuel rushed to his aid. Shocked and horrified, the preacher clutched the doctor's arm and yanked him to his feet, away from the flames that had

nearly set him ablaze, away from Elizabeth's wrathful intent.

Elizabeth chortled. The wicked little grin on her face spoke of sick delight. She seemed pleased with her malice, Samuel saw.

He and the doctor exchanged amazed glances. When the others saw how awfully the physician had been handled, they had grown affright, panic-stricken. Grace, who was huddled in a corner, brainlessly bolted from the home, content to remain in the cold rather than fall victim to Elizabeth's rage, or whatever plagued her.

Elizabeth relished their fear. She taunted the others, mocked them, spat at their faces, pretended to lunge at them. And whenever they flinched or cowed in fear, she would laugh with such sweet spite that it looked almost playful … *almost*. Still, they dared not play her game. They couldn't if they tried. Horror had rendered them stiff as pines, and there was no telling what harm might befall them.

Now, for the first time, Samuel feared her hostility. His heart pounded in his chest like war drums at a powwow. Until now, he had never seen such venom. Not in all New England. Not among Christians. Not even among the savages, those red hell hounds. But, who was this Elizabeth? What had happened to the dutiful maid? Was there some horrible witchcraft to blame? Whatever the case, Elizabeth Knapp seemed a daughter of perdition. A mistress of scorn. She had become a revenant of her own self, with little trace of her better nature. Elizabeth was now something … something … *other*. She was rage. She was chaos. She was hell in human skin.

It was all Dr. Edwards could stand. Before the cloudy, pulsing mouth, he moved with haste. Ignoring his singed coat and blistering hands, he seized upon the maid with full weight. He wrapped his arms around her as tightly as a beartrap, restricting her movement.

Samuel, seizing the opportunity, tackled her at the legs. The company fell to the boards with a thudded, bumpety *clump.*

Elizabeth landed in a howling rage. On her back, she thrashed like an animal caught in a trap, kicking wildly at the minister, bucking at her heels.

The room filled with shouts and commands and strange noises. Grunting and growling, Elizabeth spat at them with unspeakable insults. But that only caused the doctor to press harder against her. Crushed beneath his weight, it appeared she had been subdued. But only for a moment …

One arm suddenly wrenched free, Elizabeth grabbed a fistful of ash-blond hair from behind his skull and yanked back, drawing his face to hers. He could hear the roots tearing from his scalp, and for an instant, her face filled his world until a wetness coated his eyes, ran down his reddened cheeks.

Elizabeth spat then bellowed an anguished scream that curdled his blood. Her mouth seemed larger somehow, misshapen. A stream of rank breath hit him square in the face. He sucked in a lungful of the horrid stink, a combination of sulfur and things long dead. He could taste it—taste death. His stomach retched. He tried to turn, but the spikes at the back of his head drove deeper at the slightest move. Elizabeth had an iron grip. Yet, it was her eyes that terrified him most … the look in them.

Blood and venom and scorn blazed in one murderous glare. True Evil.

An icy shiver raked along his spine when he peered into them. He turned his eyes away from her stare, turned ghostly pale.

Those eyes …

Next he knew, he was airborne. Elizabeth, releasing her grip, had launched the physician from her frame with uncanny force. Somehow or another, she had gained animalistic speed and reflexes and managed to wedge her arms between them. Elizabeth ejected the doctor as easily as if

he were a child, sending about two hundred pounds of flesh and bone crashing to the boards. Incredibly, Elizabeth had boosted almost twice her body weight.

Elizabeth leapt upon him in an instant. She planted her knees tightly onto his chest and excoriated him for such foolishness. She showered him with vile insults. She insulted his character, his skills, and even went so far as to openly name his private sins.

“Hadst thou much to drink lately, doctor?” she taunted cruelly. “Drunkard!” Elizabeth slapped his face. Hard. The unmistakable sound of flesh hitting flesh filled the chamber. Elizabeth then clutched his throat and squeezed. She continued to berate him as her grip grew tighter and tighter. Dr. Edwards was losing air *fast*.

All of a sudden, in mid-sentence, Elizabeth erected, arched backward, and howled a devilish cry. Only, in pain this time.

A sharp blow to her back had caused her to break off her mischief. It had been swift and stunning, stung.

When she turned, she found Samuel clutching a large branch. He had grabbed a tossed stick from the planks and whacked her across the backbone. Suddenly, her rabid stare dissolved into that of a wounded child, eyes watering. Elizabeth looked back at him with disbelief.

Was the spell broken? Samuel took no chance. He discarded the stick and quickly threw her into a stranglehold. With his arm clamped tightly against her voice box, Samuel dragged her off the faltering doctor, backward, kicking and cursing as he did.

Not to be deterred, the medic again tossed his full mass on the willowy maid. And the two wrestled her as though fighting some twisting serpent, tossing to and fro.

Time warped. It stilled and sped at once. How long the ordeal lasted, none could say. An instant? Hour? It all felt the same.

Elizabeth roared and shrieked until she finally fell limp beneath a twisted pile of flesh, her breath ragged, face digging into the grain. Elizabeth, at last, fell silent.

It ended as suddenly as it had begun.

On their feet, a bewildered Samuel sought the physician for her savage distemper.

Petrified, wounded, and astonished, Dr. Edwards stammered out his response. “Th-this is diabolical,” he announced, trembling. “I’m afraid I could do no more for her. I advise extraordinary fasting … and gather the minsters.” The doctor then fled in fear.

His swift, fevered exit gave Samuel pause to wonder and cause for alarm. *If there be no medical cause, then truly she must be …*

No, not that. Samuel couldn’t allow himself to consider such a dreaded thing.

While pondering Elizabeth’s limp frame, he choked the black thought down, driving it from his mind. Truth be told, reasonable answers were dwindling, his nerves more. One thought was that she was mad. But her own cognizance proved otherwise. *A lunatick knows not whether he is a lunatick.* Another, witched. But by whom? Certainly not the Barron girl. *Such a thing must needs be weighed with great scrutiny, and conscience.* Perhaps Elizabeth was vexed by evil spirits, a third choice. But if so, then there must be an opening for evil to enter her life, a doorway of sorts. A hidden hypocrisy perhaps. Secret atheism. Sin. Lastly, the blackest possibility of all, Elizabeth was in league with the devil, truly.

Things only grew stranger. There was little reprieve to speak of the following day. Or the next. Then, on the Monday morning after the

outburst, Samuel's sleep was broken. Not by the usual cock crow, but by a bark. A restless bay of the dog kind. It woke Samuel and probably damn near half the commonwealth, it was so loud. It seemed to come from just outside the home, near the back.

Annoyed and drowsy, he rose from bed, knuckled the sleep from his eyes, and then moved to the window. He rubbed at the frost with his sleeve then looked out the pane. He spied the meadow below but could see no barking dog, only patches of withered grass sprawling to meet the grey and sunless sky.

It sounded close. *Too close*, Samuel thought. The bark was deep and loud, and mixed with an oddly familiar octave. Samuel then tracked the sound. He followed it down the stairs, to the first floor, across the common room, toward the back, and into the maid's chamber, where he found Elizabeth barking like a mastiff at the top of her lungs.

Still dressed in her shift, she stood erect a ways from the hearth, barking noisily into the air. It looked as ridiculous as it sounded. Even so, the dim pulse of the fire gave her a dangerous appeal.

Elizabeth ignored his company as she woofed and woofed. She barked endlessly with little to no rest. Oddly enough, her vocal chords never strained or tired, Samuel observed.

As the day dragged on, so did Elizabeth's queer barking. She ruffed and ruffed and ruffed some more. On and on, it continued. It stretched for hours with little interruption. Only to change noises did she pause. At times, she exchanged the barking sounds for those of a goat. The deep-pitched *woof-woof* had dissolved into a nagging *me-he-he ... me-he-he ...* and back again. But for the most part, she barked.

Elizabeth didn't stop. Couldn't stop. She tried. She really did. But, with each attempt, it was as if a geyser would well up within her and overpower

her will, and the strange sounds continued to spill out. The curious noises kept at her for hours. She did not eat. She did not sleep. She barked, and bleated, and barked some more until Samuel damn near severed his ears from his head with a meat cleaver.

Day turned to night, dusk to dawn before Elizabeth fell silent, finally. At about twelve of the clock, Elizabeth stilled, and the house quieted at last. Only, it was now Tuesday. Incredibly, it would take an entire two days before the bewitchment faded and Elizabeth came to herself. Amazingly, Elizabeth carried on for about forty-eight hours straight with hardly a pause.

Tears came before the confession. Another one. Once again, Elizabeth had fallen to tears over her actions. She was overcome with sorrow and despair. On Samuel's account, her agonized tears were enough to break a heart of stone.

When the spells broke, and the reality of her actions hit her, Elizabeth was overtaken with remorse, despairing her soul. She waxed repentant, confounded by her bizarre behaviors. And the more she thought about them … about the reckless outbursts … about the cursing and spitting … the ugly assaults … and especially the vivid impulse to commit murder … the more distraught she became. A tumult of black emotions warred within her. A jumble of embarrassment, shame, and regret filled her for both the strange animal noises and her violent antics. The grief threatened to swallow her alive. *How could I act with such cruelty? I am no more than a wretched Indian. I am a monster.*

Her despair was not lost on Samuel, who did his best to console her. But that was hopeless. Elizabeth refused to be comforted. And all his good counsel fell to deaf ears.

> *... then her speech was restored to her, & shee expressed a great seeming sence of her state: many bitter teares, sighings, sobbings, complainings shee uttered, bewailing of many sins fore mentioned, begging prayers, & in the houre of prayer expressing much affection ...*[12]

At first, the sullen maid was hesitant to speak. Not for shame, but for *fear*. Inwardly, she was afraid of herself. Afraid of the strange power that had overshadowed her, consumed her desires, and driven her to such appalling wickedness. Afraid of what it might be demanded of her next. Afraid she might obey.

The dark thoughts silenced her for a time.

Samuel mistook her silence for secrecy. Still, behind the guilt-ridden remorse, he believed there was more to her tale. He was not wrong. The whole ordeal reeked of something queer. The outbursts had been too violent, too vicious, too malicious to be of any natural origin, too *unhuman*. Even the doctor had said as much. *Diabolical*, he had called it. But, what was Elizabeth hiding? What, if anything, had been left unsaid? Samuel meant to find out and pressed her about her relations with the devil.

“Tell me, how far have you gone? Have you left anything behind? Anything at all?”

Elizabeth shook her head, *no*.

“Then, to what do you owe these afflictions?”

“I could say no more. *Pray thee*.” Elizabeth fidgeted, staring at the floor. Her throat was raw, her eyes red and swollen, and her cheeks were flushed from the raw emotions. Tracks could be seen where the tears ran down them, hot and bitter.

“Look at me, Elizabeth,” Samuel urged. “You are *unwell*. I am trying to help you. Come now, unburden thyself.”

Elizabeth swallowed a strained swallow and wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand. “I hope I am no witch.” Her complaint sounded little more than a child of three, maybe four. She sniffled.

She thought for a long moment, biting her lip.

After further convincing, and realizing Samuel would not relent, Elizabeth began the tale.

“He came down the chimney, and in many ways, did assault me.” Elizabeth stared directly into the flames.

Samuel breathed a slight groan. *Not again, the hearth*. He rubbed a temple with his fingertips as Elizabeth explained.

“I tried might and main to escape his charges but could not. He seized upon me and sat upon my breast, and with many arguments, did try to persuade me to serve him. ‘Soon your time is past,’ he spake over and again. ‘There is no hope for you unless you serve me. Thou hast confessed enough. Henceforth, you may serve me more securely, without punishment.’ He promised ease for my toils continually, money, great importance.” She snapped her head toward Samuel. “Make your peace with God now,” she warned. “Consider your days.”

That was not all. Elizabeth expressed a desire to kill. Others, herself … his children.

The confession was more than Samuel bargained for.

The urges began early on, she told. One such time, in her old town of Watertown, she had attempted to do away with herself. “The devil handed me a sharp billhook and bid me to self-murder,” she explained. When she could no longer endure the powerful impulses, she had set the blade to her wrist. But at that instant, James Knapp had entered the kitchen. And seeing

what she was about to do, he had snatched it from her grip. She had argued with him to return the knife, to no avail.

A similar incident occurred shortly after. According to Elizabeth, by Providence, her father had ruined a second attempt. Only, this time he had hidden the knife. Elizabeth had later found it atop the barn roof. But the urges had passed by then, and she relented from harming herself, or another.

Another time, Elizabeth had tried to drown herself in a well. Tantalizing things in the black water below had beckoned her. Jewels and lace and fancy dress, and such things that appealed to her young desires. And when their shimmering allure grew too irresistible to ignore, she had climbed into its mouth to snatch them. But the enticements had not been real. It had all been an illusion, a trap, a trick of the enemy to make her destroy herself. "But I got stuck between the walls," she reminisced with a sheepish half-smile.

Samuel was glad for the admission, but it opened a whole new argument. Because, if the incidents indeed had occurred at Watertown, as she claimed, then Elizabeth would have been about eleven at the time … which meant the manifestations stretched further back … which meant the devil had been appearing to her for *five years*, not the three she had originally confessed. A mistake perhaps.

As the quarrel and calculations formulated in Samuel's thoughts, Elizabeth suddenly added, "He demands your blood." Her smile died, and her face turned somber.

Samuel hesitated. "What do you mean?" He stared past Elizabeth's expressionless gaze.

She smirked. "The devil aims to see to your death."

"Dare he try," Samuel scoffed.

"He hast before. Once … through me." Her eyes danced with mischief.

“The night on the stairs,” Samuel remembered.

Elizabeth nodded gloomily.

“I remember it well. You did hide something behind your back, I saw. But I suspected you meant no cause for harm. Your face—”

“He bid me to murder you whilst you slept,” she told with a hint of cruelty, severing his statement. “He placed the billhook in my hand, and next I knew, I was before the stairwell, climbing toward your bedchamber, when—”

“I rose.”

“Aye, I grew affright when you appeared at the top of the stairs and quickly hid the blade behind my back. And, coming to my own, found not the courage to perform such a horrid thing.”

Samuel was shocked, stung. Far as he knew, there was no ought between them. He had always treated her charitably, kindly. True, he was firm at times, but no more than most master/servant relationships. He could not recall a single reason for her actions, not one. None deserving of murder, anyhow.

Let it shew you the great danger you go in …

Stranger things were afoot. Samuel could feel it. Elizabeth more so.

Something stirred. Whatever that *something* was, Elizabeth sensed it in the wind. A strange sensation churned inside her belly, fluttering like an army of black butterflies—dark, beautiful. Like the wind, it went unseen. And like the wind, its effects could be felt; stormy gusts across a darkening sky. The brooding feeling excited Elizabeth, stirred her to further oddities.

After another lengthy, howling, spastic spell, Elizabeth grabbed a crooked stick from the pile, placed it between her legs, and began to ride it like an imaginary horse, or witch's broom. Her skirts bunched at either side of the oaken emblem as she pranced the common room. With her free hand, she stroked the pole in an almost obscene manner as she went … up and down, down and up. Next, the stick was used as a sword of sorts. She thrusted it this way and that, left, right, stabbing the air with piercing motions, but then she stopped suddenly. Something seized her attention.

Elizabeth ran to the window and peered through the diamond-paned glass, the stick at her side. Her breath misted the pane. At first, she saw nothing. But then … *something* … wigwagging in the distance. Moving quickly, it was gliding in midair, dancing above the tree line, hurtling through the sky like rogue cannon fire. *What in God's name is …? That could be no bird.* Elizabeth watched with curious fascination as it approached steadily. Now, over the meadow, it flashed and flickered,

moving with jagged, incremental motions. The vision alternated forms as it flew, lucid, strange, terrifying. In one instant, a woman; next, a dog; now, a woman again. The maid stared fixedly at the entity, announcing each change as it drew ever closer until it came into plain view.

"Witch!" Elizabeth yelled. "*WIIIITCH!*"

The anomaly was subhuman—a woman's head crowned on a dog's body. Part human, part mongrel. It was riding a wooden pole, its great black paws wrapped around the stick. Strange as it seemed, Elizabeth knew that face—a devout woman from the village, highly esteemed.

"Goody Gibbins," she announced excitedly. "Goody Gibbins is coming. Look, Master Willard, *Look!"* Elizabeth panicked, as the half-beast quickly approached the home.

Samuel was wary and, quite frankly, tired of the tomfooleries. Half-annoyed and uninterested, he moved toward the pane. It was as expected—nothing. There was no witch in the clouds. No dog. No woman. No dog-woman. No sight of his parishioner riding a pole.

Samuel looked at Elizabeth disapprovingly and shook his head. But then suddenly something crashed upon the roof.

Elizabeth looked up in alarm. It landed with such force that she thought the ceiling might cave. It shook the rafters. But Samuel couldn't hear that either.

By her worried expression, Samuel could tell it was no jest. She was serious. Dead serious.

The phenom burst into the room with sudden surprise. It passed unhindered through the wall like a ghost. It had a hound's face now, Elizabeth saw. More a bull than canine, its glossy blackish-blue coat defined its every muscle, brawny and powerful. And beneath the hard, furrowed brow, its eyes glowed like two burning coals, mean and menacing,

with a snarling scowl to match. The great black beast charged across the room like a horse rushing into battle.

Elizabeth screeched at the sight. Her fingers tensed around the stick. She took a weak, nervous swing as it brushed past her skirt. But the hell hound was quick on its feet, and she missed. It lunged left, twisted its body away from the blow, and continued to drive headlong toward the hearth, its large claws digging into the boards.

Elizabeth watched, amazed, as it darted into the charred mouth then vanished. Next, she heard a rustling inside the stack. She could hear its claws scrabbling between the clay walls, lifting, climbing upward. The poltergeist, she claimed, exited through the chimney.

Elizabeth ran after it into the hearth. She tried to catch a glimpse as it escaped, but it was too late. It was gone.

She twirled this way and that, looking for the creature. " 'Twas right here," she said. "A great black dog. I did see it, truly. With mine own eyes." There was an edge to her voice. She sounded nervous, confused, and afraid as she searched the ashes for evidence, peering up the shaft.

Worried, she tried to convince Samuel of the mysterious canine that had stormed through his home, which was hard to do since the whole event had been invisible to him, inaudible. He hadn't seen or heard a thing.

Samuel looked at her dubiously, like the way a parent pities a child who swears the monsters under the bed are real.

Samuel was about to voice his dismay when Elizabeth blurted. *"There! Look!*" She pointed excitedly to a spot on the stones.

Skeptical, the minister's doubts quickly dissolved to marvel when a massive pawprint was spotted embedded in the clay, where it had leaped up into the chute. Samuel's eyes went wide with wonder, with disbelief. He traced the print with a finger. *This is not possible ... yet ...* It was, to his

surprise, just as she had said. Some creature—some*thing*—had scurried up the stack. The evidence was clear. It was undeniable. But, what had it been exactly? Had he not seen it himself, he would have chalked it up to madness, or fumes in the brain. '*Tis the operation of Satan, undoubtedly,* he surmised.

But, although the evidence stared him straight in the face, Samuel argued against his thoughts. Part of him wanted to believe. Another part refused. Something *had* left the impression, that was plain to see, but … Still, Samuel Willard, admittedly didn't know what to make of it all.

> *I shall not conclude, though something there was, as I myselfe saw in the chimney in the same place where shee declared the foot was set to goe up.*[13]

The dog's advent marked an omen. It signaled the terror to come. Unholy terror. Only, Elizabeth hadn't expected it to come with such venom, nor as quickly.

The night was long and cold and filled with an uneasy expectation.

Before retiring to bed, Elizabeth prepared the little brick hearth in her quarters. She set enough wood on the flames to last the night then crawled into bed. She had a bad feeling, a very bad feeling. There would be little sleep, she knew, but at least she would stay warm while waiting for … *what?* The unknowing chewed her nerves like a rat gnawing on wood.

Abed, the crackling flames soothed her more than she liked, made her eyes heavy until all went black. The fires would chase the cold, but not all the darkness, not entirely.

It seemed as if her eyes had just closed before they suddenly shot open. Elizabeth jolted awake, flushed with a startling realization—she was not

alone.

Two shapes in the dark. Goody Gibbins appeared without warning with a small boy at her side, his pale hand clasped in hers. The pair stood before the hearth. Round and rosy-cheeked, Goody Gibbins was dressed in her signature brown petticoat. A white coif covered her sandy-blonde hair, done up in a bun. Her smile was kindly. Her eyes were not. The lad's even less so —dark, dead. He was no more than six, Elizabeth guessed. She could tell by his dark grey breeches, by the size, how they fit above his black hose and buckled black shoes. His doublet was grey, as well. A black cloak draped down his back. He wore a wide-brimmed hat made of black felt. And the white kerchief at his neck was made with lace, Elizabeth carefully noted. *Too sumptuous … unlawful.*

The thoughts passed senselessly across her mind in the moments between sleep and waking. Her skin prickled at his presence. Or perhaps that was the winter chill. As she glanced the figures at the opening, Elizabeth could swear she saw the fading fire glow through their forms, at the bottom. Coldness penetrated the room.

Affright, Elizabeth sat up, clutching the covers against her chest.

In a blink, holy Goody Gibbins fell upon her with unholy wrath. The cherubic smile died from her lips. Elizabeth felt a ripping at her chest then a searing pain she had never known before. Three bloody marks serrated the flesh at her left breast, then the right one, then left again. The wounds appeared as though exacted by talons rather than human hands. Crimson seeped through her shift, spreading across the fabric in cloud-like clusters of cherry-pink. Goody Gibbins had clawed at her chest without mercy.

Elizabeth howled, but her scream deadened when the lad swiftly cupped a hand over her mouth. It felt cold, hard, dry as a cadaver's skin against her soft flesh.

The sullen child leaned in and whispered something in her ear, but Elizabeth couldn't make out the words. It was unlike any tongue she had ever heard. To her, it sounded like cracking fire mixed with the buzzing of angry bees swarming round a disturbed hive. Something evil, she knew.

He laid a fist into her ribs. Elizabeth twisted in pain. It felt as though an anvil was crushing her cage. She could hear the bones crunch inside her. She was certain he had broken a few, if not all. The lad sank his teeth into her side.

The boy continued to hammer away at her sides, blow after iron-fisted blow, while Goody Gibbins shredded her breasts, slash after cold-blooded slash. The shared assault left her sides mottled with ugly blue and purplish-black blotches, her chest a red ruin. But the wounds given by the boy were somewhat curious. The marks appeared larger than you would think, about twice the size of the lad's tiny, balled fists. An odd thing.

Goody Gibbins was poised to kill. With an upraised hand, she swung down with cruel spite. Elizabeth shielded herself with her elbows, eyes screwed tight. Another blow to the ribs. But as Goody's hand swept down, while in mid-swing, she suddenly dissolved like mist into the darkness, along with the child, that diabolical lad.

Once Elizabeth realized she was still alive, and alone, she found herself guarded against … against … *nothing?*

Haunts? Specters? Witches?

By the time it was over, Elizabeth had been beaten within inches of her life. Unfortunately, it was not the last of it. The incident hastened a series of vicious molestations that occurred throughout the long, cruel night. And the next. Goody Gibbins appeared and vanished repeatedly. Sometimes the pale boy was with her, sometimes not. Nevertheless, each visitation proved acid.

One more barbaric than another. Each left Elizabeth in a heap of bloody ruin.

Just what Elizabeth feared more, she couldn't say—the waiting or the whippings. The waiting made her nervous, paranoid. The whippings left her broken, near dead. Between attacks, she hoped and prayed that the darkness would pass, that the tortures might cease. That if she slept, it would all seem a dream. That none of this was real. Only there would be no sleep for Elizabeth Knapp. Only terror. Torture.

Pain.

Butchery and battery were not all. Strangulations struck, too. At times, she felt invisible hands at her windpipe, choking, squeezing the breath from her lungs until barely alive. During the times when Samuel was present, without speech, she used gestures to communicate the unseen suffocations, to tell Samuel of the evil.

The lashings took their toll. The agony carved years upon her face—her youthful expression stripped as bare as the oaks, her grey-green eyes sunk deep into their sockets. She appeared shrunken and miserable, a hollow shell of her former self. Never had Samuel seen a more pitiable creature. But, what was the meaning of such malice? Were the twilight attacks meant to coerce the maid, or was there some darker issue?

Or both?

Her ears grew hot, her blood cold. And her round face was flushed with raw emotions—shock and surprise, confusion and concern, anxiety and anger. The rotund woman fiddled with the laces of her bodice, where the ties hung about her melon-sized breasts. She shifted impatiently at hearing the accusations for the first time. Her round cheeks reddened by the chill in the room. But that could just as well be the fear that was growing inside her.

“She must be captured,” Elizabeth insisted before her coming. “Only the rule of law could end these afflictions. Never till then. Goody Gibbins must be brought to justice. She must!”

Even as Elizabeth said it, to hear the words *captured* and *Goody Gibbins* in the same sentence sounded absurd to Samuel. Besides, there was no clear basis for the claim. Not even the wounds she had suffered would convince him otherwise. Especially since they were hardly noticeable.

Remarkably, with each molestation, the lashings had healed and vanished abnormally fast, unnaturally, leaving her pale skin to appear as it normally would. But that was only so Elizabeth could be torn afresh with each new attack. All that could be seen now was a little scratch here, a tiny wound there. Nothing to raise eyebrows.

Once more, Elizabeth had impeached a God-fearing neighbor. Once more the accused had been called into question.

Goody Gibbins struggled to formulate the words. Her double chin wobbled as her mouth opened and closed, almost too shocked to speak. She was clearly taken by surprise, offended.

“I … you … Reverend, thou mean to name me a witch?” Goody’s eyes moistened, like a sad puppy. The pained look in them stabbed at Samuel. “Lies. All. My heart is innocent before our Sweet Redeemer, as you know most well. My conversation blameless. *Jesus* knows, over and above, *He knoweth*.” Goody’s hurt turned to annoyance. “Very well then. I suppose, lest this fallacy continue evermore.

“Show me your hand, child. Come, come now, Elizabeth. Delay no longer. *Give me your hand*.”

Reluctantly, Elizabeth held out her hand.

“There,” she addressed Samuel. “Might this be to your satisfaction? I pray God.”

It was. Nobody was surprised by the outcome, least of all Samuel. When he saw that the witch-spell had not passed to Goody, the supposed attacker, he was relieved, remorseful.

Inasmuch as Samuel hated to investigate the sweet-spirited goodwife, it had to be done. For the good of the country. Heaven.

It was a sour cider for both to swallow. Samuel felt regret. Goody violated. Elizabeth sick.

"Only a touch, is all?" she said.

Samuel tasted the spite. He answered with a cold, piercing stare. *The remarkable gall on her, this one.*

Elizabeth lowered her eyes, her hopes for a witch scandal dashed.

Afterward, Samuel apologetically bid the woman her leave, grateful for its end. As for Goody Gibbins, she exited with her head bowed. Vindicated, yea … but humiliated. Hurt.

After both Hannah Barron and Goody Gibbins were found guiltless, Samuel enquired about her malicious claims against them. Why did she attempt to involve the authorities?

Elizabeth blamed the devil. "He told me he loved me," she gave in response. "He persuaded me to believe it was they who harmed me, not him. He said he would free me from their torments and convinced me that I should implore the magistrates, demanding, 'Bring them to the full censure of the law'."

As for that wicked child, he was not at all what he appeared. He was, Elizabeth later told, the devil in disguise. Evil takes many forms, and this was but one of his masquerades.

A young oak to the right of a worn trail marked the meeting house. Its icy branches were dusted with snow and stretched like skeletal fingers over the

covered ground, trembling in the cold. The small log church with its small, steepled bell tower, rested near the tip of the commons where three roads met. These framed the commons, making its entrance accessible from any direction. The meeting house would play host to the luminaries.

Samuel had called for the holy men immediately, at the behest of the astounded doctor days prior. A heavenly call to arms, so to speak. He meant to discuss Elizabeth's situation with them in private, to lean on their combined experience, wisdom, and understanding, to determine whether her distemper was as the doctor said—*diabolical*. And if it pleased God, to set her to liberty, or decide otherwise. Whether God would be pleased remained to be seen.

Outside the sky was a dismal grey vault. There sun was somewhere, but it was hidden behind that wall of grey-white misery. The bitter wind was whipping, and the snow was falling. Not the soft fluffy kind you could catch with your tongue, but the hard, icy kind that pelted and scratched your face as it fell.

Inside, the church was drafty and cold and dim. Two candles burned atop a long, rough-hewn table. There was an ink well and a black-feathered pen, the plume of a black crow. To one side, four timbered steps led to the platform where the table rested, beneath the pulpit. It served for the General Assembly, for various civil, judicial, and religious matters of the town, where land rights were distributed, court complaints settled, and punishments meted out. Today, it would serve for matters of another sort.

Pale light spilled through the wood-framed windows and onto the raw bench rows in dim shafts. Even the window behind the pulpit, where Samuel preached, reflected as a large smoke-grey blanket, dull and cheerless. The corners of the timbered, uncolored walls receded in darkness.

Gather the minsters. It felt so long since he had heard those quavering words. But, in truth, Samuel could count the sunsets on one hand.

Three ministers had braved the elements on horseback to attend the solemn affair. Winter's teeth had made their journey a slow going. Two rode from Concord, Reverends Joseph Eastabrook and Edward Bulkeley. It was some six leagues from Groton, but the weather had made it seem half a world away. The lone divine, Joseph Rowlandson, had trekked from Lancaster, some seventeen miles from the opposite direction. His journey had lasted longer.

The companion clerics from Concord arrived first. Reverend Eastabrook entered the humble structure first. Dressed in all black, Eastabrook was a tall, gaunt man with bone-white skin and eyes that gleamed like polished onyx. His black-brown hair was short, swept back, and a widow's peak fell at his brow. And his pointed goatee and mustache, in the Van Dyke style, did little to conceal those high-sunken cheeks.

Right behind, Reverend Bulkeley was about the most revered man in all New England. About twice Reverend Eastabrook's senior, he was an original founder of Concord. His fame and influence spanned the colonies. The evangelical came from a line of English Separatists that reached back to the Old World. His preacher father, after numerous warnings, had been ousted from the Church of England for refusing the religious dictates of King Charles I. That same unyielding faith was also found in him, so much so that even that sachems revered him. Bulkeley was rumored to pray such fiery prayers that the Indians feared to attack his town. If ever there was a man to shed light on the case of Elizabeth Knapp, truly it was him, Samuel hoped.

Reverend Bulkeley entered, wearing a woolen light-grey coat, matching breeches and burgundy hose. His salty-grey hair, curly as lamb's

wool and parted down the middle, brushed his shoulders. He had soft, fleshy, pink cheeks, red with cold, and a weak dented chin. His blue-green eyes were small, round, and sparkled sagacious.

Amid the chill and gloom of the ill-lighted church, the ministers set to task. At their seats, talk at the table quickly turned grim. A heaviness filled the room, sober and serious.

Ever aware of the gravity, Bulkeley tried to lighten the mood and said, "Dark room for a dark discourse, it would seem." His voice was a thin and tiny rasp, mildly playful. He huffed into his cupped hands then rubbed them together for warmth.

The pair greeted Samuel and took their places at the table.

"Aye, a thorny business," Eastabrook agreed. He placed his hat on the floor beside the chair then swept his fingers through his hair.

"Would that it were thorns only," Samuel replied. "I could smell the roses, at least."

"So. How fares the maid?" Bulkeley wasted little time. "Elizabeth, is it?"

Where to begin? "In good spirits, for the time. Poor creature has suffered most grievously at the hands of her afflictions."

"A good thing perhaps. God's afflictions carry away ill humors better than all the *Benedicto Medicamentum*, as the physicians say. Makes the virtue shine as polished brass."

"Not these humors."

"What signs has she shewed?"

Bashing heads, attempted murder, attempted self-murder. "Violent in bodily motions. Bellows and roarings that would break a heart of stone. Illustrious *fancies*. Abigail is sore affright and threatens to leave for her

father's." Samuel left out the part where she injured two friends and nearly set the doctor ablaze.

"Away with fairies, might be," Eastabrook said. "Distracted."

"Nay, methinks it more than madness."

"What of the doctor? Has he looked into the matter?" Bulkeley steepled his hands.

"None for the better, I'm afraid. He administered some physick, but it has shown ineffectual thus far. It was he who named it malice. Hence … well … here we are." Samuel picked up the black plume, turning it between his thumb and forefinger.

"What do you mean?"

"When he at first treated her, she shewed good improvements upon her spirit. But … then fell sicker still about a week later."

"How so?"

"She appeared sottish, stupid." Samuel thumbed the edge of the crow feather thoughtfully, the ridges soft and stiff beneath his touch. "At times, she'd quake or become rigid. Other times, erupt with a kind of lunacy. To crown all was her extraordinary might. She refused to be bound. Not by mine own strength, nor the physician, nor anyone for the matter. The doctor suffered injury without cause. Elizabeth, I fear, might be—"

Immediately, the door flung open with a hard *bang*. A cold wind filled the room. The candle flames fluttered, nearly extinguished. Outside, horses neighed. A silhouetted figure appeared in the entrance. A faint shadow fell along the planks.

"Ah, Mister Rowlandson, alas," Samuel announced. "What kept you?"

"Snow's covered the bloody footpath," he said, stepping inside and wiping the snowy crystals from his shoulders. He stomped his black boots then shut the door, barring the winds that snatched it from his fingers.

“Nearly reached the Indian trail before making my way back. Bugger me dead, it’s warmer outside.”

“I *know*,” Samuel sighed. He waved the plume. “Come.”

Long-faced and long-nosed, Reverend Rowlandson wore a weathered brown great coat to his knees, with a pale yellow surcoat beneath, the only hint of color. His breeches were chestnut, his stockings beige. He had long, golden-brown hair, pinned behind his lobes, and baggy bronze eyes. But both were concealed beneath that wide-brimmed, wooly cap of his, also brown. A stubbled beard shaded his jaw. He reminded Samuel of an English Golden Retriever, only not so cordial at times. The musket slung across his back evidenced that, beechwood with iron furnishings.

Named *The Apostle* among peers, he was cut from the same irascible cloth as the Protestant Reformers that preceded him. Once, he had posted a scathing letter on the meeting house door, which ridiculed New England for allowing envy to outrule justice. Rowlandson could be rather dogged in his faith.

The same could be said of all the clerics. But depending on who you asked, opinions varied. Not all saw the men in the same light. To Catholics, they were rebels. Protestants, holy. Quakers, hostile. To Almighty God, chosen. Chosen to carry out His will in the land. Men tempered with mercy and Christian virtue. Sword and silk, velvet and iron, such were the rulers of the New World.

Rowlandson climbed the platform, leaned his rifle against the table, and then sat. Glancing around at the company, he noticed an empty chair. “Where’s Increase?” he asked.

“The illustrious Mr. Mather could not join us, I’m afraid,” Samuel replied. “Pressing matters in Boston, so he says.”

“Doubtless *he* should be here.” Rowlandson seemed agitated by the luminary’s absence. “Surely, he would illumine the matter.”

“None to worry.” Samuel held up his pen. “I shall supply a full report once this marvelous folly discovers itself.”

Bulkeley cleared his throat. “Very well. Now, where were we? Oh, yes. Mr. Willard was speaking of the maid’s distemper. Such behavior is not without cause, in my experience. Tell me, what has she owned?”

“None more than most her ilk. Disobedience to parents … profaning the Lord’s day … worldly desires above her station. Nothing to warrant such woeful lamentations.”

“Ah, but sin is a subtle beast; we all know. Even the smallest of sins carry great temptations.”

“Little foxes spoil the vine.” Eastabrook nodded. “ ’Twas a gnat that choked Pope Adrian, mind you.”

“Caesar was slain with bodkins, as I recall.” Bulkeley’s little eyes went wide and sparkly.

“Now that was a wise gnat, was it not?” Rowlandson smiled. “Pity it was just one.”

Bulkeley waxed spiritual in his usual way. “Consider this; God the Father spared not His own bosom son. No, not for the least sin, but would make him drink the dregs of his wrath.”

Samuel grew impatient. “Sirs,” he said, perhaps too harshly, “we are not here to discourse foxes and gnats and bodkins, I remind you, but *the girl*.”

“Ah, the fair maiden,” Rowlandson said caustically. “There is a witch in the settlement; looks to me.” He was quick with his opinion, having once been called, at Elizabeth’s request, to pray and counsel her.

Eastabrook prickled. “It wouldn’t be the first in the commonwealth.”

“Why here? Why Groton?” asked Rowlandson. “Does he wish to vex the trees?”

Samuel returned a tired look. “Satan shows the most malice where he is hated most.”

“There are witches in the land, to be sure,” Bulkeley affirmed. “Wretched rogues. Have you heard about that Cole woman?”

“In Connecticut?” asked Samuel. “From Swedeland.”

“New Hampshire. Eunice. Eunice Cole. A vile creature, as I hear it.” Bulkeley crossed his arms, leaning back in his chair. “About fifteen years ago, she was in the courts for numerous suspicions. She, so I’ve been told from a merchant of virtue, was suspected of witching her neighbor’s cattle. Cursed his cows for eating her grass. A week later, one died of mysterious causes, then another not long thereafter. The town’s minister … oh, what was his name …?”

“Wheelright,” Eastabrook reminded him.

“Yea, Wheelright. Well, he had whipped her bloody. She was searched for a mark, but she scratched it away to escape discovery. Some have even claimed to hear familiars nursing beneath her clothes whilst at meeting. Now she sits in the gaol at Boston, awaiting judgment on another charge—*confederacy with Satan*.”

“Perhaps Increase has taken her cause,” Rowlandson teased.

A solemn look passed across Bulkeley’s face. “Pray *not*, for her sake. Should such things continue as they are, the country would suffer a witch panic that it would scarce recover, viz a vie Europe, abroad.”

Eastabrook’s expression soured. “That shall fall as a spark on wet tinder here. Among God’s holy people? Never.”

“Maybe so. But I shall give the devil no quarter. No, not in the least. Not on my charge.” A clear and certain authority rang in Bulkeley’s thin

voice. “I believe you mentioned delusions, Mr. Willard. Of what sort?”

“Specters.”

“Specters. You mean *ghosts*?”

The company exchanged suspicious glances.

Samuel shook his head, rubbing his jaw. “More an apparition. She has claimed to see certain … *things*.” He tapped the pen on the table, glancing at Bulkeley.

“What things?”

“Things in the dark—shadows. Professes her molestations were performed by our pious neighbors. Two of mine own flock.”

“Thou believe her?”

“I believe *Elizabeth* believes what she saw. But what she saw may not be what it so seems, if you take my meaning.”

“Aye. In what form were these specters?”

*Dare not mention the dog. Certainly, not the dog. “*Human. In the very sense of the word—flesh and bone. She impeached one Goodwife Gibbins, a sincere professor. Said to have appeared in her very likeness—same form, same dress, same manner, *voice*. Only, it was not her, but a profane resemblance. Same for the Barron girl.”

“How do you know?” There was a sharpness to Bulkeley’s tone, Samuel detected.

“Well, for one, she came through the chimney. Truth be told, if you saw Goody, you would know this was impossible. Secondly, and more importantly, I did test her myself. No clear discovery was made, and her touch returned to her not. What’s more, she recited the Lord’s prayer in a precise manner. She is no witch, not by any measure of the imagination.”

Eastabrook shifted uncomfortably. “Spectral powers are found only among witches. Granted of Satan.”

“Yea, but could Satan represent the shape of an innocent person, to perform evil?” Samuel brushed the feather through his fingers.

The question caused a stir among the ministers, who shuffled in their seats, murmuring.

“Now, that’s a question worth the king’s crown, is it not?” Rowlandson scratched at the scruff on his cheek.

“Such things are indeed astonishing. Rare.” Eastabrook fingered his pointy beard. “Even so, who can be sure that the mastiffs of hell must always be chained? If those base Pharisees called Jesus—the greatest man to ever live—a *witch*, then why not this corrupt picture of a witch befall a lesser creature? Is it not possible?”

All eyes turned to Reverend Bulkeley.

“Why not?” he said sharply. “Satan doth more harm in his sheepskin than roaring like a lion. I have read that such things are afforded only through a compact, a diabolical treaty.”

“The devil’s book,” echoed Eastabrook gloomily.

Samuel let the remark wash over him. He stared off ponderously at a bar of light slanting through the pane, watching the dust motes dance their slow, shimmery dance, as if an answer could be seen in them. After a long pause, he said, “This demands serious consideration. If ever thought true, people shall see the devil behind every corn row and ox cart in the country. Consequences would be damnable.” He tossed the pen on the table discontentedly.

Reverend Bulkeley smoothed out a wrinkle on his sleeve. “We have the laws of God, and the statutes of the English Nation for the discovery of witches—the excellent Mr. Perkins, Bernard of Batcomb. What more? Look at the hand of God in it, Mr. Willard. He is wroth with the land, in my

estimation. And has cause to rain hell from heaven upon us. Tell me, has she covenanted with the Wicked One?"

Careful. "Elizabeth has yet to learn her letters," Samuel said cautiously. "I should hope not."

Bulkeley made a tsking sound. "That so. Then you must needs look to it, Reverend, and quickly. Elsewise, the dragon may swallow *you* in his great red wrath."

"Why kick against the pricks?" said Eastabrook. "Hand her to the magistrates and be done with her."

"Lest the wrath of God fall upon us," added Rowlandson. "And our majesties' disfavor."

Even though the room was wintry, Samuel felt a heat crawl up his spine. "Truly, you mustn't believe … This … this is a case of *conscience*. She—"

"Nay. This is a case of prudence and expediency. So, we must decide whether she is fit to be restrained, *devil or no."* Bulkeley drove his fleshy finger into the table to accentuate the words.

"The girl shall be scandalized beyond measure," Samuel urged. "Her reputation tarnished from here till Doom's Day."

Bulkeley pursed his lips, eyes sharp as swords. "You are most modest, seems to me. The devil falls upon Groton, and you wax judicious?"

"Yea, this is *our* Promised Land," Eastabrook avowed.

"Our Beacon upon a Hill." Rowlandson thumped the gun stock against the platform to stress his point then laid the musket across his lap.

"It has fallen upon us to root out the devil's filth wherever it lies." Bulkeley crossed his arms. "As I see it, this is a case for the magistrates. Put it to the courts and let the judges decide the way of it."

“Men, thy mercies are niggardly!” Samuel shot back. “You are divines. All. Be reminded of that.”

“Aye, and the eyes of our Fathers are upon us,” Eastabrook returned.

“For Christian *charities*,” Samuel reminded. “Hell’s teeth, you are called as *ministers*, not *murderers.* Ask we our own hearts … should we not pity such a one as her?”

“*Pity?*” Bulkeley snorted. “You pity her youth, but I pity the holy law of God. Pity the glorious name of God. Pity the land, which seems to me fearfully defiled, if you ask me. The country cannot be cleansed until it has spewed out this … this … *unclean beast*.”

Samuel suddenly rose. “They shall *hang her*.” He slammed his fist on the table. “In her tender years!”

Bulkeley was unmoved. “Let the leaves fall where they may. We have a solemn duty before God. And we must needs see to its conclusion, whatever befalls her.”

“Solemn, aye.” Samuel leaned his hands on the table’s edge. “For the salvation of her soul, not the destruction of her body. Is this not our Lord’s will? His sweetest—*yea, chiefest*—desire? Or have you all lost your callings?” Incredulous, Samuel studied each with a stern look. “Show yourselves men of God this hour.” He sat.

A heavy silence filled the room. The ministers retreated to their thoughts, and all that could be heard was the horses stirring beyond the walls and a slight crackling of candle wick, the tawny glow flashing upon their grave expressions.

Samuel grabbed the quill and thumbed at it absently. Rowlandson fiddled with his rifle, pinned a strand of fallen hair behind his ear. Eastabrook counted the timbers on the ceiling, fingering his goatee. Reflective, Bulkeley rubbed at his upper lip with a forefinger. The elder

minister glanced from one to the next with a flinty stare, mulling his decision, then gave Samuel a measured look. Samuel could almost hear his gears grinding.

Bulkeley, bobbing his head, broke the long and brutal quiet, saying, "Very well, Mr. Willard. But let me tell you this … the creature's life is in *your* hands." He folded his hands on the table and leaned in. "*And the English Cause upon your back*." His voice was thick with warning. "Pray."

Samuel's unease deflated like sails in a dying wind. Relieved, he turned his eyes heavenward as the others took Bulkeley's lead and bowed their heads.

"O' Lord, thou hope of New England, look mercifully down upon us. Grant us wisdom to know the course. Abhor not Elizabeth, but cleanse her and save her for thy mercy's sake. By thy Holy Spirit, lift up a standard against Satan. And if it please thee, Lord, speedily let the devil be bruised under our feet. Amen."

Amen.

Whispers became rumors. Rumors fostered gossip. Gossip festered fear. Before long, the tiny wilderness town was embroiled in a kind of panic. Seemed the injured friends couldn't keep their wagging tongues, and soon the details of Elizabeth's disturbing actions had passed from one house to the next, a flame leaping from brush to branch. A strange euphoria swept the colony.

Elizabeth soon became the chatter of hearth and home. And as all eerie controversies go, the stories grew wild, sordid, and tall as shadows. In the retelling of events, some cited Elizabeth's eyes had glowed red, like a demon's. Others reported that a tail could be seen sticking out from beneath her grey gown. The Black Man himself had appeared in the room was another, a good one. None was true, of course, but some tales grew fangs

and talons all their own. But such slandering put Elizabeth Knapp in the sight of fire. From the law. From other things.

Earlier, at dawn, Elizabeth had prepared the morning fires. This time, she had decided to split fresh logs rather than use an untouched pile near the hearth. But, by now, the flames were dancing bright, tall and snapping, the coals cherry-red beneath charred ash and cinder.

The common room was cozy and warm, and the hazy air was filled with an aroma that reminded Samuel of fried bacon—smoky and savory. He appeared from upstairs where he had been preparing a lecture for the upcoming Sabbath. Days had passed since Elizabeth's outburst, and Samuel was more resolute than ever to gain a full disclosure, especially with Bulkeley's warning looming large in his thoughts.

And the English Cause upon your back ...

The words haunted him like some grim ghost. *Fail*, and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ would cease to reach the New World. *Fail*, and the commonwealth would fall to Satan's ruinous hands, erect his evil kingdom. *Fail*, and the heavenly mission would be aborted. *Fail*, and the Lord would pour out, as Sodom, His great wrath upon the land and its people. Fire, brimstone, death.

No. Failure was not an option.

He wanted nothing more than to end this ordeal, but it seemed he was no closer than when it first began on that dreaded night before All Hallows Eve.

"Do you hear what they are saying?" Samuel asked. "They have named you a witch."

Elizabeth remained stone silent, studying her shoes. Her white cap pulsed with amber shades in the firelight. She had no idea how truly

fortunate she was, how close she had come to being handed to the magistrates. Neither did Samuel reveal as much.

Instead, he grew impatient and said, “Let me be plain. If you keep this course, you shall be hanged for a witch.”

Marvelous. Even that failed to move her to words. The maid seemed as closed as an oyster guarding her prized pearl. Samuel wished for some magic word that might make her speak, to utter what he suspected true, a suspicion that gnawed most achingly of late.

Better to pry a shoe from a horse, her.

With Elizabeth’s silence, it was hard to know what was going on inside that mind of hers. *Dark thoughts … twisted thoughts.* But by her reddening cheeks and slit eyes, it was clear something was eating away at her.

Elizabeth crossed her arms tightly against her chest.

“No words,” Samuel said. “The village has grown affright. Doubtless it shall not be long before the magistrates come calling.”

Elizabeth clenched her jaw. *Nothing.*

Samuel pressed on coaxingly. “Remember, if we have made Jesus our adversary by sin, yet he awaits to be gracious in mercies.”

Silence. Gross silence. Except for the fire, which snapped hungrily in the hearth. That and the boards beneath her feet, which creaked a little as she shuffled from foot to foot. *Cre-eeak, cr-eeeak …*

Samuel was getting nowhere. He grew frustrated and impatient. It was all he could do to reveal how near she had come to being handed over. Rather, he cut to the quick.

“Have you signed the devil’s laws?” he asked pointedly. “Tell me; why hast thou no heart to confess—”

“*Tell me*,” Elizabeth blurted sharply, lifting her grey-green eyes from beneath her cap. “Why am I here? In *your* home? With *your* family? Am I

such a burden to mine own father that you should make me a slave? To feed the fires all morning and all night?" She motioned to the hearth, the floor. "To scrub floors till my fingers run bloody? Tend the stupid cow-house till my limbs grow benumbed with cold?" Elizabeth dug her dingy nails into her palms, at her sides.

"Your speech is unseemly." Samuel glanced her up and down. "Hold your English tongue, or I shall have it branded. Know your station, *girl*."

"Would that I were a witch that I might fly o'er marsh and meadow. Yea, abroad … away from all such *labors*." She spat *labors* with such venom it seemed an accursed thing.

Samuel didn't appreciate the exchange. Servants were not to speak against their masters, especially in the tone in which Elizabeth had taken. It was grounds for punishment, painful punishment.

Samuel grabbed the iron poker from beside the hearth and drove it between the logs and into the glowing coals.

Elizabeth lurched toward Samuel. His grip tensed around the handle. She drew so close he whiffed her breath, a mix of something sour and sweet, like vinegar and apple cider. He had readied himself for an attack, but she simply sank to her knees and burst into tears.

Elizabeth crumbled, shattered like porcelain on stone before him, weeping bitterly at his buckled shoes. "Help me, Master Willard," she cried. "*Prithee-eeeee!*" The word turned into one, long, desperate sob. Heaving with lament, Elizabeth drowned into the grey skirts pooling about her folded form. She reached for his leg, almost worshipfully.

Samuel took a small step back. He unhanded the tool, knelt, and then lifted her to her feet. When he did, she folded her arms around his neck. She planted her face hard against his chest, muffling the wordless cries.

Samuel could feel his shift grow wet where the tears soaked through. Hesitant, he offered an awkward hug. He spoke in a hushed tone. “Elizabeth, you must tell me …”

Samuel felt her body quake against his own, felt her hands behind his collar, felt her fingers twist around a wave of brown … soft, tender, teasing.

“Ho.” He peeled her off. “Elizabeth, I am your *pastor*,” he said, holding her by the shoulders. “I can help you in diverse manners, but not like that. Sit.”

She did. But the rejection only upset her more.

Deeply ashamed, she doubled over and wept into her hands. “How truly worthless I am … thou hast no idea,” she said pitiably. “God has all the right to allow Satan to torment me. I am unprofitable to all.”

Yet, for all Samuel’s prayers and counsels, Elizabeth complained, to no avail.

“All your efforts have taken no effect. All is wasted on me.” Elizabeth tried to convince Samuel to quit praying for her. She held her hands up in defense. “Nothing more can be done.” She explained that he had more important concerns than to worry about her, that it was hopeless to even try. The melancholy maid hemmed and hawed until finally she insisted, “*Stop. Praying*.” It sounded a threat.

From that point, Elizabeth’s emotions swung like a pendulum. She wept aloud then fell silent. Grew sullen then hopeful. Bleak then cheerful. But, was there a reason for such wild mood swings? Perhaps answers to her current troubles lay in the past, in her upbringing? Perhaps.

It was a rare thing for Elizabeth to be an only child. Odd. Most families had at least six or more children. Such a thing would make her an outcast at an early age. As a child, unable to process such feelings, the rejection would unquestionably make her feel alienated, alone, without any sense of

belonging. To add insult to injury, with the death of James II at four months, her bereft mother would have had little left for Elizabeth's needs. It was more than likely that this incident proved taxing on the matriarch, plunging her into a dungeon of despair and depression.

Inevitably, Elizabeth's loneliness and lack of nurture would cause her to detach from the world around her, prevent her from fostering meaningful relationships. Elizabeth Knapp would need to fill that void in other ways, mysterious ways.

But her mother wasn't the only negative force. In his days at Watertown, James Knapp had been charged with the capital crime of adultery. It was punishable by death. He was accused of having an affair with the widow Mary Davis, who had given birth to a son. Davis insisted that Knapp was the paramour until she breathed her last. However, for unknown reasons, he was somehow cleared and escaped the death penalty.

His good fortune was not long lived. The following year, 1656, James Knapp was charged with drunkenness. More a moral transgression than a crime, offenders were typically subjected to public shame. The guilty often spent several hours locked into the stocks or pillory in the public square, or in the gallows with a rope around their necks, where they might be pelted with garbage, mocked, or spat upon. Or all. Sometimes, they were forced to wear a sign detailing the crime, or a symbolic letter. For example, the letter "D" for drunkard, in this case. Even so, whichever penalty James Knapp bore remains unmentioned. Nonetheless, these accusations would have hung as a dark cloud over the Knapp household, and undoubtedly shroud the family with shame and suspicion. In speculation, it could be the very reason the family removed to Groton in the first place.

Moreover, returning to Elizabeth Warren Knapp, she was thought disturbed. Maybe mad. While no hard evidence exists, a diary fragment from about 1658 by Boston merchant, John Hull, reads:

> *There was a woman of [iileg.], Knapp; pretending to rail, and being troublesome, she went to prison. Sometimes she would hate Quakers, sometimes plead for them; sometimes weeping tears, she could, out of herself, speak not a word to any; sometimes weary others with much speaking.*[14]

Was this about Elizabeth Warren Knapp?

Without a definitive identity, it is hard to say for certain. But if that was the case, Elizabeth Knapp's childhood consisted of an adulterous, alcoholic father and a demented mother, possibly. Add the tragic death of her only sibling, and a clearer picture of Elizabeth's mental state comes to light. That said, Elizabeth's past was one of loneliness, despair, rejection, and emotional turmoil. It would set her on a dangerous course, making Elizabeth a powder keg, set explode at any given moment. With all that was stacked against her, there was little hope of her ever rising from the ashes. Without some marvel or miracle, she would remain a dark, broken-winged phoenix forevermore.

In the first grips of winter, on December 4th, stranger things came to light. The fire was waxing low and the room cold.

"Put more chips on the fire," Samuel told Elizabeth while seated fireside. He gestured toward a neatly stacked pile.

Elizabeth turned away, unwilling. *No.* She drew her clothes tightly.

Even in Elizabeth's current condition, it was an unexpected reaction. For the most part, she had always done what was asked of her.

Samuel, supposing he went unheard, requested again, "Elizabeth, *more chips*." But the more he insisted, the more resistant she became.

She glanced sidelong at the pile with revulsion and girlish revolt. Elizabeth shivered.

The request was simple enough, but it had conjured a memory she would much rather forget. Better to leave it untouched, as the nearby stack. Why? Handling the timber meant submission to the Evil One. Many a time, the devil had offered Elizabeth help with her chores. However, his offerings were not as kind as it seemed, but subtle acts of manipulation meant to woo her to his will. Bait. There were silver hooks set in those shiny purple plums. Elizabeth knew it. She might have been young, and a girl, but she was no fool. She understood the devil's wiles from Samuel's cautionary sermons. She understood the deceit masked behind his kindness, as his character sometimes suggested. Therefore, Elizabeth always refused his services, refused the wood pile that he had mysteriously placed beside the hearth. The stack she dared not touch. The firewood's uncanny appearing, along with other magical conjurings, scared her. But if his generosity provoked dread, then …

Elizabeth told Samuel as much, and he marveled that the devil would dare enter his home. Cavalierly at that. If he could enter the sanctity of his home, then what more? But, in truth, it shouldn't have come as such a surprise. When he thought about it—about certain past incidents—the dots began to connect in his mind, one by one. *Ah! Of course, Samuel. How could you be such a blind fool?* Certain scenarios replayed in his thoughts, clear as sunshine. Why hadn't he seen it before … how Elizabeth stalled or made up silly excuses to stay longer after her lessons …? How she waited

for nightfall before going home? That was before she had lived in Samuel's home. And when darkness fell, a notable gentleman would appear outside and escort her home. The stately man with the greying coif and white neckcloth. Samuel had seen him numerous times. Only, this was no ordinary man. This, Elizabeth later told, was the devil incarnate.

Still, a more telling incident had occurred back on Thanksgiving—October 19th, the date then celebrated. Elizabeth and the other maid had grown afraid when a strange man had appeared outside a chamber window. In a fit of panic, the girls had barged in on Samuel and his guests as they dined and celebrated. Samuel had then instructed others to escort the pair outside, to address the stranger. But when they had, Elizabeth had jostled them aside and dashed headlong out the door to meet him. She had been filled with excitement. *Excitement!* Not *fear*. Elizabeth hadn't appeared afraid, as one might have expected, but expressed what could only be described as *smitten*.

While the incident went unmentioned, Samuel made certain to note her out-of-step actions. Samuel had had his suspicions about the elegant stranger. He had not been wrong. When pressed, Elizabeth would later reveal his true identity. " 'Twas him," she gave candidly. "Lucifer."

Let it shew you the great danger …

December ye 8th

It was the blackest of Fridays. The world outside was bleak and cold. Inside, dark. Not for want of sunshine, but it seemed as festive as a funeral inside the firelit common room.

At around ten in the forenoon, friends had gathered to attend Elizabeth in Samuel's absence, as he was away on some unspecified errands. Among

them, the gangly, goose-necked girl, whose injured arm was now upheld by a sling of rope.

It was a day of sadness, and torment. Once again, Elizabeth was relentlessly assailed with fierce and fearsome afflictions. The tortures—more powerful than ever—had throttled her beyond endurance. So much so the company thought her bones might break under the mighty shakings. In the moments of brief respite, which were few, the company tried to enquire of her unusual shuddering. Even if she could explain, would they understand, truly? Somehow, Elizabeth didn't think so.

Her evasive answers gave rise to suspicion. Collectively, they felt she was hiding something, something grotesque, evil. Their suspicions were not wrong. And while Elizabeth might have seemed stupefied, she was not so incoherent as to reveal her darkest secret. *Dare not! Else the pain.*

It was truly unbearable, the pain. Vexed, Elizabeth was torn between what was right and what was wicked. Either was damnable, she knew. But the longer she remained silent, the blacker she felt. The more it hurt inside. When she choked it down, she could feel the words twist in her belly like a pit of black snakes. She wondered how relieved she would feel if she only …

No! She again jailed the words that tried to escape from behind her lips. The confession swelled in her throat, but she forced that creature down to the hellish pit from whence it came. It tasted like black bile going down. *No, no, no!*

Elizabeth could hardly recall a time without torment. Imprisoned in her own skin, she longed—yea, *ached*—for liberty. But at what cost? Any way you cut the coin, there was hell to pay. On the one hand, if she confessed, she would be branded a horrid witch, a road which led only to scandal, scorn, shame … death. *The gibbet, most assured.* On the other hand, the

devil would condemn her to hell. Damned if she did, damned if she didn't. But still … anything to stop the torment.

In her mind, she could see herself telling her blackest secret, sin. She had rehearsed it in her thoughts many times. Once, she came close, but when she was about to speak, another spasm erupted. Her jowls clamped as she fell into a quivering trance, silencing the dark words. The company would have to wait for another pause.

Her lips parted as the words climbed. Elizabeth meant to tell her deepest, darkest secret when a memory darted her thoughts, a threat. She swallowed. She recalled a time when the devil had seized her, sat on her chest, and reviled her with accusations. When he mysteriously appeared in the common room, she had attempted to run and hide, but that was stupid. He had easily snatched her and flung her to the boards.

"Thou hast gone too far," he had said, jabbing a finger in her face. "Your only hope is to serve me now. *Or else* …"

Next, he had opened to her a vision. Elizabeth felt a falling sensation, and the room had given way to a vast cavern—dank, gloomy. It stretched endlessly in either direction, impossibly high. Inside, she stood atop a lofty, jutted crag. In the shape of an arrowhead, it overlooked a sea of smoldering amber, veined with radiant red rivers, like molten metal, her wicked *Virgil* at her side. The surface had seemed a mix of blazing liquid and noxious gasses. Her breath had grown agonized as she had tried to draw what little air she could.

The memories flickered in her mind—the scalding, sun-like heat … the vomitous reek of burnt sulfur and exhumed things … the charred ground, how it crunched like volcanic glass underfoot … the eddying deep, how the vapors snaked from its surface, filled the dark with a sickly yellow haze.

Once again, she could almost taste the throat-burning fumes, taste the rot. She recalled the scorched walls with its deep, angry scars; the crooked shoals peering from the sea wells, all aglow and crackling like heated coals. Black patches of scum curling slowly on the surface. The receded cells, with their durable iron bars, burrowed deep into the crude rock. Elizabeth swore she saw monstrous, scaled creatures moving amidst their shadows, seething. Something had slithered along the embankment, large and disgusting. The loneliness, she remembered. Despair. Death. The overwhelming sense of abandonment almost saddened her once more. How utterly hopeless she had felt, as hopeless as those trapped in the glowing gloom below—the souls of the damned.

Screaming.

Yea, screams. Those horrible, hideous cries that had tormented her. The numberless cries, echoing off the rocky, obsidian walls, filling the chasm with inexorable terror, haunted her dreams. More than anything, she had wanted to run, to escape, to be anywhere other than that miserable pit. Her eyes had darted desperately about the cavern. No escape.

"Can you show me heaven, as well?" she had asked hurriedly, anxious.

The devil had waved his hand dismissively. "Oh, heaven is an ugly place," he had said rottenly. "None are there, but a company of base rogues, whom I hate. But if you will obey me, it shall be well with you." He grinned wickedly. "*Watch*."

Suddenly, the sea had begun to rise, and with it the screams. Fuming and festering, the deep had grown troubled as it crept the walls, vapors hissing like a den of angry serpents. And the higher it had climbed, the wilder and more desperate the cries had grown. Elizabeth had watched as countless souls flailed about the hellish cauldron, shouting, shrieking, drowning.

The sounds had been chilling. She had heard cries of pain, despair, regret, anger, and bitter blasphemies against the Holy One. And although they had begged God for mercy, none had come.

She had heard the laments of old men, young men, women, children. Earthly status, titles, and pedigrees made no difference. Kings, queens, popes, priests, wealthy merchants, princes, and paupers alike tasted the same infernal whip. While they might have seemed something in their lifetimes, they were counted as nothing in this horrid abyss, less than nothing.

The rising tide had alerted the doom. From the corner of her eye, Elizabeth had spotted something falling from the recessed darkness above. Small, round, and pale-yellow, it had been about the size of a hailstone, plummeting toward the sea. Pointing, she had watched as it crackled, sparked, then enflamed.

Brimstone, she had heard her guide say, detecting an evil glee in his tone.

With its elongated red tail, it had seemed like a bloody tear dropping as it fell. There had only been one at first. But then another. And another. Another. Until the void filled as rubied stars in a dark sky, pulsating with an eerie crimson glow. A red night. Elizabeth had watched their shadows streak the walls like raindrops down a windowpane … as the firestorm unleashed its blood-red rage upon the troubled deep, and the damned.

Judgment had struck the sea. The burning stones had fallen like hard rains in a pond, each with a *plop*, one right after the next. The sea had reacted with anger, sending great plumes of fire, pale-blue and purplish-black, high into the air. Flashing deadly, erupting as geysers, they had thrust upward some hundreds, maybe thousands of feet overhead. Elizabeth could

feel the forceful heat as they had shot past the ledge where she had stood, thunderstruck.

Fwoomp … fwoomp … fwoomp.

A sound had been suddenly heard, far off. A howling, haunted moan. After some moments, a violent wind swept into the chasm. Elizabeth had heard it before she had felt its deadly heat, before she had seen its ruin. It had reverberated from deep within the cavern walls like a band of anguished ghosts. It had grown increasingly louder until the chamber had filled with a deafening howl and searing wind, until the towering flames were gathered in its fists. Soon, hues of black and blue and pitch-purple fires had twisted together. A bruise-colored funnel had formed.

Massive and ominous, it had begun to churn, slow at first, then intense, as it had drawn the sea and its charged gasses into its vortex, until it twirled with unthinkable power, fury, and dread. Vengeful bands, like fiery whips, had lashed crude, deep-cut wounds into the walls as it spun. A testament to the tempest's fearsome wrath.

Hidden behind the whipping bands, lime-green explosions had burst. It had reminded Elizabeth of the way heat lightning flashed within a thundercloud. The dreadful claps, made even louder by the chasm's echoing effect, had rattled her bones. Elizabeth had clapped her ears.

BOOM! BA-DABOOOM! DA-DOOOOOOM!

For a few terrifying moments, the chasm had danced with pandemonium. Fires whirled. Seas raged. Gasses hissed. Explosions burst. Voices wailed. Had it not been so utterly terrifying, it might have been a thing of beauty and wonder, but now Divine Terror.

Holocaust.

Helplessly, Elizabeth had watched the spinning nightmare carve its destructive path through the abyss. Undulating, it had snatched up the

forsaken masses, blasting the flesh from their grotesque, half-melted forms before flinging them as ragged nothings about the pit. This had continued until the firenado dissolved and the sea fell silent, along with the voices. But just when Elizabeth had thought the horror had ended, the flesh somehow had returned to their bones, and they had revived once more … but only until the torturous cycle had repeated itself.

Everlasting horror.

All this sped through her mind in a wink. Elizabeth spurned the memory, and the devil's final words. This was but one chamber, he had informed her. There were countless more, each with its own terrors. And for good measure, "Your time is at hand," he had warned. "Fail me once more, and I shall send you here to suffer my wrath. *Forevermore."*

What gall! Elizabeth let out a girlish huff at the audacity, as if squaring up with some inner demon.

After three hours of her own internal tug-of-war, she drew her gangly, one-armed friend aside, away from itchy ears, and began to tell her a dark tale. Whether for spite or revenge or just plain stupidity, she couldn't say exactly. Nervous, the words tumbled from her reluctant lips.

"Once I removed here"—gesturing to the surroundings—"the visitations grew all the more frequent." Tears welled in her eyes. "One day, whilst alone in the lower chamber, I saw out the window an old man traveling the great meadow laying near the home. I did suspect it to be him —the devil. I was most inclined to run away, but I had a mind to tarry it out and hear what he might say. And when he came, he shewed me *the book*. 'You must write thy name in my book,' he insisted. He then demanded my blood forthwith.

"But I did argue against such an unholy thing, truly. No, no, do not look on me in such a manner, pray thee. I am no monster." Elizabeth rubbed

at the tears running down her cheeks. "'But I cannot write,' I told him. 'I know not how.' And when I could resist no longer, he handed me a knife and bid me to cut my finger. And … I did so. He caught the droplets in his hand, and when a pool gathered and there seemed enough blood, he stooped to pick up a little sharpened stick from the ground. 'I shall help thee,' he said. 'I will guide thy hand.' Then he dipped the stick in my blood and handed it to me. And I—he, my hand in his—did write my name."

Confession was good for the soul. But that only lasted so long.

Soon, it turned to torture. When Elizabeth unburdened herself, a weight had lifted from her shoulders. To her, it seemed as if clear sunshine had broken through a long winter's gloom. The friend, unfortunately, didn't feel the same. Her gut wrenched, her face turned bone pale and, by her terrified expression, you would think she had seen a hobgoblin. At a loss, she stammered wordlessly for a moment, then fled the home, cupping her mouth with her good hand.

The sweet relief quickly soured. Once Elizabeth realized what she had done, she immediately regretted her decision. She could see the consequences clear as day, but not all of them. Whatever levity she had felt was quickly swallowed by fear, uncertainty, and grim expectation.

Elizabeth shuddered. But what did she expect? Her confession was utterly shocking, scandalous and, quite frankly, dangerous. To herself, to others. To mankind. What possessed her to make such a claim?

Not long after, Elizabeth confessed to the room, in Samuel's absence. The minister would learn the ugly details on his return later that day, toward evening. But not from her, not entirely. That was left to the others who,

affrighted, seemed a bit too eager to toss Elizabeth under the horse cart. The rest of the story would come piecemeal.

Samuel had hardly entered the home before they rushed at him with the news, dancing with a sort of macabre excitement.

Although Elizabeth opened to the company, she was not as frank with Samuel. He learned what he could from the others. The rest, well, was like pulling teeth from a toddler. She remained difficult, evasive, and unyielding. Even so, Samuel had somehow managed to extract this, the most damnable details yet—terms of the witch-pact.

Elizabeth revealed the blood-sealed conditions. In sum, a seven-year contract had been cut between them. It bound her to serve the devil for one year. In exchange, he would serve her for six. And would make her a witch. But that arrangement was set to expire, and very soon.

Despite the terms, the bargain wasn't enough for the fiend. It never was. He demanded more. Demanded she sign a new contract *before* the current one expired. This, she told, was the real reason for all her troubles—that she refused to sign a second contract. But there was a great difference between the two terms, a grave one.

The one bound Elizabeth to service for a year.

The other, life.

Elizabeth Knapp had already vowed most of her young life to him. Could she suffer the rest? Elizabeth believed not.

Shockingly, by Samuel's calculations, Elizabeth had been ensnared since about age nine. Samuel found the revelation troubling, and downright disturbing. According to Elizabeth, she had already signed *the book*, made a covenant, and offered her blood.

But what of the new contract? When Elizabeth had repeatedly refused to sign yet another pact, he had grown insistent, aggressive. "I shall tarry no

longer," he had said through slitted eyes. "Sign the book." But Elizabeth would not falter.

"I shall not!" she had returned in defiance.

Then the aged and stately figure had said crossly, "You have done so already; what further damage would it be to do it once more? For you are mine sure enough." The way his tone had softened a little at the end was almost charming, almost.

Still, Elizabeth would not fall to his charms, not again. To forfeit her soul entirely with the stroke of a quill was more than she could bear. "If I have already done so … and I am yours sure enough … what need to desire any more of me?" But her quarrel had fallen on deaf ears.

The devil had struck her.

Not with a fist, but with a seizure so terrible Elizabeth had narrowly escaped with her life.

But what about the original covenant? Did the devil uphold his end of the bargain? Had Elizabeth been made a witch as promised? Moreover, could any of this be true?

A couple days later, Elizabeth had a change of heart. When Samuel returned from church the following Sunday, she said as much. Through regrettable tears, Elizabeth recanted her confession. She denounced it all. Everything—*the book*, the devil, the contract, the apparitions. A marvelous fancie, all. She had dreamt up every bit of it, she told.

Certain doom undoubtedly caused her to reconsider.

Dubious, Samuel was finding it increasingly difficult to balance grace and godly authority. It was one of his most treasured virtues, but it had now grown strained under the unusual circumstances, and he wondered when it might break, wondered where mercy ended and judgment began.

Nonetheless, Samuel offered her a chance at redemption. It came in the form of a challenge. “If you can convince the whole of a lie,” he said, “then it shall indeed be well with you. If thou cannot, then you must needs be satisfied with their conclusion, whatever the outcome.”

Elizabeth grew hopeful. “I would like nothing more,” she returned, grateful. “I shall turn their opinions toward me, whatever it takes. Watch and see.” Thus, Elizabeth was to state her case before those whom she had formally given confession. She must convince them that she had lied, that it was all a great folly, or pay the consequences, whatever the cost.

Only a miracle would sway them, Samuel knew. The group was fully convinced she was in league with the devil. Of this, they were certain. It wouldn’t be easy to untangle the sordid web that she had weaved. Her story —true or not—was too incredible to deny. It was provocative and repulsive at once; its fascination equal to its dread. To steal their convictions would be like wresting prey from a hungry wolf, especially now that the court of public opinion had ruled unfavorably toward her; a rapidly growing sentiment among the citizens of Groton. Although Elizabeth would have the chance to prove herself, she would need a sword to sever their beliefs. A sharp one.

Before taking his leave, Samuel gave a final word of advice. “Bring your sharpest argument, Elizabeth,” he cautioned. “You shall need it.”

At that, Elizabeth answered with an agreeable but nervous nod. Come nightfall, Elizabeth would face the challenge.

A crowd gathered outside Samuel’s home that bitter evening of December 10th. Gawkers, gossips, busybodies, and scandalmongers, for the most part. News of the meeting had spread as fire on dry grass, somehow. What was only a byword just weeks earlier had become a bonfire. Samuel could no longer douse the flames, nor the strange euphoria that had swept

the colony. All of a sudden, Elizabeth Knapp, the unremarkable maidservant, had become the talk of hearth and home. Groton was a bed of morbid excitement, hysteria, and fear.

Despite the biting cold, curious onlookers clamored for a glimpse of Elizabeth Knapp, the colony's newly minted dark star. Brimming with anticipation, they shouldered each other for a better view through the frosted panes.

There was something in the icy air that night. Something invisible yet palpable. It danced with a certain expectancy, eerie and electric. It felt dangerous, like the on-edge moments right before riot and chaos ensued among a restless mob. But what did they hope to see? Her red rage? Crooked contortions? Perhaps for her to fly away on a broomstick? Maybe glimpse the Prince of Darkness himself? Witness a murder?

Rumors and whispers floated among the crowd. Some questioned why, of all places, the devil would choose to invade Groton. Others speculated that God was wroth with them for some unspecified sin. *What have we done? It must be a sign.* Still, a few tried to lessen the gravity with nervous jests or by casting pretend hexes at one another with, "Lo, you are a toad!" or "Behold! A pig!" But nothing could dampen the strange somber feeling that filled the air like chimney smoke from the town's numerous stacks.

And there was another sense, the sense of being watched. Invisible eyes peering from somewhere in the darkness, watching. Or was it from the deep wood? None could tell. It seemed everywhere at once.

Elizabeth didn't know it yet, but she had been scandalized, branded; not with a red-hot iron, as was common for lawbreakers, but with a new name:

The Witch of Groton

When it came to the welfare of the country, no other figure posed more danger than the witch. The witch was repugnant and revered. With her wretched appearance and malignant powers, the very image filled New Englanders with infinite dread. She was scarier than bugbears or goblins or ghosts. Scarier because she was *real*. The witch was a real person who did real things to real people. Dark things. Demonic and deadly things.

The only thing more frightening than the witch were the stories themselves. Strange accounts of flying on poles at night, the conjuring of deadly spells, witch masses in the deep wood, and human-to-animal transformations were both fascinating and frightening. Parents told them to scare disobedient children into good behavior … else the witch would get them. Worse—*eat* them.

To be named a witch was a thing of shame. One of scorn and derision. The stigma was ruinous. Even if found innocent, it utterly destroyed one's life and reputation. Once labeled with such a profane title, it was near impossible to revoke.

It is a fact that Samuel himself believed in the demoniacal origin of witchcraft but held moderate views on the subject. He took great pains to preserve the names of the innocent.

Samuel would later argue in a Salem court transcript, *Some Miscellany Observations on our Present Debates Respecting Witchcraft*, saying, *"Without scruple, there being no crime more scandalous and abominable; nor any that is with more difficulty wiped off."*[15] Witchcraft was truly a scarlet letter. The mark of Cain. Bar sinister.

Inside, Elizabeth stood before the hearth. The cracking flames at her back hardly cut the chill in the room. It did even less to warm the tensions of the grim-faced company gathered before her.

Save the fire, the dimly lit room pulsed with muted shades of amber. A pair of lanterns burned; one on the mantle, another the table, where two more beeswax candles burned. Others had brought their own lanterns, as well.

The hearth's tawny glow gave Elizabeth a foreboding quality. Somehow, it made her seem more dangerous than her slight frame suggested. Her shadow, about twice as tall as her own, flashed upon the walls in fractured intervals, upon the company's sullen expressions. It grew monstrous, then small, then huge again. Dark to light. Dark to light.

Samuel motioned for her to begin.

Elizabeth seemed confident. Too confident perhaps. "The devil, at sundry times, appeared to me because l loathed my state," she began loftily. "My labors did cause much grief upon my spirit. And I could neither be content at home nor abroad. Thus, I was sorely tempted to practice in witchcraft and wished earnestly for him to come at such times, to settle my life. If he did, I vowed to give myself up, soul and body. But he came not. Therefore, I have been preserved from such a thing."

That was all she said.

Hogshit! Disappointed, Samuel exhaled a quiet groan and pinched the bridge of his nose. *In God's name, what was that?* The contradiction was so glaring it could have blinded him. Neither did it escape the company, who answered with shock and outrage.

At once, the party reviled her with shouts of scorn and ridicule, especially the gangly, one-armed friend, who had remained half-hidden until this point.

"Little witch!" she cried, rubbing her injured arm. "You lie!"

"Tell the truth," another piped.

"Devil's spawn!"

Backlash was swift and severe. Angered, they bulleted Elizabeth with questions, splintered her half-cocked story like musket fire on tree bark. Given half the chance, they would have lynched her where she stood, had Samuel not stepped in.

At that instant, Elizabeth's star faded. Her proud expression fell to fear, confusion and, what seemed to Samuel, betrayal. Elizabeth shrank as the verbal onslaughts swept over her. *Poor creature.* Elizabeth was woefully ill-prepared for such hostility. In truth, she had hardly expected it. At least not like *that*. The argument had sounded better in her thoughts. *Much better.*

Actually, earlier in her chamber, she had been quite pleased with herself, the way she had rehearsed it numerous times. But when she gave the address, it sounded childish, stupid. Worse, unconvincing. And there she stood, with all the confusion of a lost child, blinking with dumb surprise.

The crowd grew more heated than Samuel had expected. Sensing their mounting hostility, he swept Elizabeth behind him, shielding her from any harm's way. Just in case.

Half-hidden, Elizabeth felt the fear entomb her.

To ease tensions, Samuel intervened with some opinions of his own but, due to their obvious animosity, he refrained from saying too much, lest he dig for her a deeper grave.

It was silly. Not only was Elizabeth's explanation senseless, it ruined her chance at redemption. Her little charade had left much to be desired, left the unhappy lot wanting, within and without. Samuel, realizing that a resolution was unlikely, abruptly ended the meeting, unspectacular as it was.

Elizabeth was naïve to think her confession could be kept secret. The feigned secrecy of friends, squealers, had catapulted her into a dark, dangerous limelight. Almost overnight, her star rose meteoric. But

Elizabeth soon discovered such notoriety came at a cost. The ultimate kind, possibly.

The door had hardly shut behind the others when Samuel confronted Elizabeth. He was disappointed and highly annoyed, and the fear of what might come next made him uneasy. It gnawed his thoughts like mites on a tree.

He spoke his mind. “In one breath, you own the devil appeared, and next, no. Come now; you have used preposterous courses! No marvel you were led into such contradictions. Dost thou *wish* to hang?” Samuel’s voice was edged with irritation, concern. “No words?”

There were none.

Samuel’s eyes flared. “A noose for your neck, and the air for your feet, Elizabeth,” he reminded.

Elizabeth did not respond to that either. Only a twitch at the corner of her mouth showed her concern. She swallowed.

“This is madness!” he exclaimed. “You have the heart of an atheist. Did you sign *the book*?”

Elizabeth just stared dully at the floorboards, sullen.

Samuel repeated himself, “Elizabeth. Did you sign *the book*? I must know.”

He wanted words but received stiff resistance instead. A thousand pitchforks couldn’t pry another report from her, Samuel knew. There was no point. Samuel soon resigned himself to defeat.

“Very well then,” he sighed in exasperation, “If you would make use of me, and more privately relate any weightier case of conscience—”

“I shall,” she broke in, rather harshly, but she caught herself and softened her tone. “If anything comes to mind. But I have said too much, I fear.”

When it came to giving Elizabeth a chance to clear her name, Samuel had had his doubts. He had hoped for the best but expected the worst. Unfortunately, the latter proved true. After her spectacular blunder, he wondered whether how, and if, it all might end … whether anything would ever be the same again, or if a greater evil was to come. It seemed that after all the prayers … all the counsels … all the questionings … he had no more answers than when it had all started months ago. Seeking closure, Samuel Willard stated his concern:

> *Indeed, what to make of these things I at present know not, but am waiting till God (if hee see meet) wind up the story, & make a more cleere discoverye.* [16]

The great danger …

Lord's Day: December ye 17th, 1671

It was the day of rest, but it was anything but restful for Samuel. Less so for Elizabeth Knapp. The day began as any Sunday in recent memory. He woke at dawn, rose, and went about his familiar routine—devotions. Donned his black Genevan robe, fastened the cravat Elizabeth had starched round his neck, white and crisp. He poured over his lecture notes one last time, gathered them up, and then headed to the meeting house on horseback.

Parishioners milled about the grounds as he arrived, hurrying inside from the cold. Some carried stone-heated foot stoves of wood and tin, to warm their feet and legs during the lengthy service ; a treasured comfort on a frigid morn as this. As far as Samuel could tell, nothing seemed out of place. Not yet anyway.

Inside were the familiar faces he knew so well. He strode down the narrow aisle and toward the pulpit. Passing the rows on the women's side, he saw Goody Gibbins at one of the benches. She appeared courteous but still a little ashamed, as well. Past where Hannah Barron sat, Constable Woods, on the men's side. Even a pair of copper-skinned Natives showed. Dressed in deer skin and fur, they stood along the back wall, curious to hear about the English God. He saw James and Goodwife Knapp. Elizabeth's absence was evident. She remained at the home. Another Sabbath broken, another transgression. Reverend Samuel Willard climbed the pulpit and addressed the congregation.

At one point during the sermon, the service was interrupted when the door swung open with a loud wooden *crash*, and a young, auburn-haired girl rushed inside, panicked, breathless.

"Something is amiss with Elizabeth!" she cried to Samuel. "Come. Forthwith!"

The startled hearers turned in their seats.

Samuel, a little confused, looked to the girl then to the audience. He wasn't sure what was happening exactly, and it took a moment to settle in.

"Reverend, come!" the voice echoed.

He came not. Not immediately. Instead, he finished the service then raced home as fast as his horse allowed. The Knapps followed at his heels, flushed with concern. Rightly so.

Samuel entered first, James followed, then Mother Elizabeth, who immediately put her hand to her mouth. The awful vision stopped Samuel and company dead.

Elizabeth Knapp stood still as a statuette before the blazing hearth. Lifeless, almost. Her torso was twisted at an awkward angle, and she hinged somewhat backward in a pained pose. Her eyes, now wells of ink, gazed

eerily into the unknown. Or maybe it was through him. Samuel couldn't say for certain. Her head was uncovered; and her hair hung in strings of dirty-blonde, made slick from the heat at her back. Her coif, Samuel saw, was tossed rudely amongst the ashes. It laid half burnt, slowly turning into cinder.

On the hearthstones, the maid stood barefoot and sickly pale, like the white of her shift. Whether she felt the heat at her heels mattered little. Her face seemed hard-lined, sharper somehow, fierce. Samuel could almost see the blue vein throbbing at the center of her brow. But that could've been an illusion caused by the pulsing firelight. Rigid, her limbs were as petrified branches, fingers a knot of twisted twigs.

Elizabeth Knapp, once again, was on proud display. She stood like a grotesque monument to some cruel god. A deviant masterpiece. A testament to its indelible power. Samuel, along with the others, had shown up just in time for her blackest theatrics yet.

It had only been a short while since the ginger-haired girl had decided to visit Elizabeth. Whether out of concern or curiosity, she had gone to check on her while Samuel had preached at meeting. She would later regret that decision.

While in mid-conversation, Elizabeth had begun to quiver then shake uncontrollably. Her sinews had constricted.

Unlike other fits, which the archfiend used to force her hand, this was not meant as intimidation, no. It was more than that. This was retribution. Revenge. For her confession, for speaking too boldly about her relations with the devil. A hostile takeover ensued.

Elizabeth, before her eyes, had been assailed by some unseen thing. An evil force. And all of a sudden, the foul spirit had crept between the walls of her soul and slithered beneath her skin like a serpent to its hole. Elizabeth

had felt the darkness bleed into her. It had burned hot, almost carnal, as it spread through her like black ink in water. At first, she had withstood it, but then, as a thief in the hands of a captor, or half-reluctant lover, realized that escape was hopeless, and at last succumbed to the inevitable end, so, too, had Elizabeth's resistance failed, and she had caved to the dark thing overtaking her world. *Was that agony she expressed, or ecstasy?*

At the same time, a gloomy presence had filled the chamber, dark and powerful. It had sucked the oxygen from the room. Had the red-headed friend not remembered to breathe, she might have suffocated. The light had grown dim, like when a cloud passed before the sun, and the room itself had seemed to shrink, somehow. She couldn't put it into words exactly, but it had felt … *evil.*

Pure Evil.

She was not wrong. Elizabeth had been overcome, as though by an enemy. An unholy trespass against the laws of nature, heaven, and earth. And what little gospel light had remained in her had fallen to darkness, without any knowable trace of her former self. She was swallowed whole, mind, body, and spirit. At that moment, Elizabeth Knapp, the ordinary maidservant, had become evil incarnate, human skin stretched tight over snake and shadow. Elizabeth Knapp, as she was known, was no more.

Gone.

Possessed.

Elizabeth had spied the girl with a wicked smirk. And the girl could swear there was another set of eyes glaring through Elizabeth's. She could feel the hate seething from behind that venomed stare. It had been a question before whether Elizabeth Knapp might rightly be called a *Demoniacke*, but what came next had left little doubt.

Elizabeth had grumbled something unintelligible. Her jaws had grown wide, and her tongue had slipped from her mouth. It had unfurled in dramatic fashion as it draped below her chin, freakishly long, frightening. Elizabeth's eyes had turned black.

Daunted, disturbed, and sickened, that was when the girl had charged brainlessly from the home and into the meeting house. She had been Elizabeth's second visitor that day, and the first to flee in horror.

Beneath the doorframe, Samuel froze for an instant, stunned. Elizabeth's parents stopped dead, too, riveted by the sight. The awed James Knapp meant to say something, but the minister only shushed him as he moved toward Elizabeth's warped figure, watchful, careful. Samuel could see the outline of her form flashing beneath her shift as he approached. Elizabeth stone-still.

Close up, Samuel glanced her up and down. He drank in the sight with great curiosity, caution. But when he reached for her arm, Elizabeth suddenly stirred.

Startled, Samuel snatched his hand back at the unexpected movement.

Elizabeth acknowledged his presence, and then the creature began speaking.

"Damned, devilish rogue," she muttered spitefully. Her voice sounded strange. It was low and hollow. *Grum.*

The company exchanged puzzled glances. Did their ears mock them? Rather than Elizabeth's girlish timbre, she spoke with an ugly strain. Hoarse, it came from deep within her throat, it seemed. And the cunning undertone didn't escape Samuel's awareness. The voice of a serpent.

Elizabeth turned toward her parents. "Rogues and fools," the creature mocked. "You are fools for going to hear that black-coated rogue. He tells

nothing but a parcel of lies." Her voice sounded as sweet as a funeral dirge. "He deceives you."

Samuel was daunted. The insult had fangs. Venom. And, for a moment, it caused him to search his soul. His thoughts drifted heavenward, nearly forgetting the wicked thing before him. "*God, do not suffer Satan to bespatter the names of thy people with those sins You Yourself hast pardoned in the blood of Christ."*

But, was the voice real? Or was it some sort of twisted act? Samuel called for a lamp to find out.

He leaned in for a closer look. The golden flame warmed her cheek, lighted upon her collar. Up close, he saw Elizabeth's throat begin to swell. Samuel watched curiously as the skin of her neck tightened and bulged. It looked as if she had swallowed an apple whole, as if a living thing were inside.

Elizabeth hissed. "Oh, you are a great black rogue."

Amazingly, Elizabeth spoke without moving her lips. Not even when sounding the labial letters*, G, B, R.* It reminded Samuel of a ventriloquist. Thunderstruck, Samuel commanded her to speak again. It was better he hadn't.

"You tell the people a company of lies." Elizabeth was fearless. No, fear itself. She spoke with such defiance that Samuel wondered whether anything on earth could touch her.

"Satan, thou art a liar and a deceiver," he replied strongly. "God will vindicate His own truth one day." He spoke not to Elizabeth, but to the black spirit rooted inside her.

Unimpressed, Elizabeth ignored him and faced the parents. She smirked. "I am not Satan," the creature teased. "I am a pretty black boy.

This is *my* pretty girl. I have been here a great while." Now, the voice was neither masculine nor feminine.

She snapped her head back toward Samuel. "Black rogue, I do not love you."

"I hate thee, devil!" he shot back.

"Ah, but you had *better* love me," the voice warned.

Samuel's blood iced. Her veiled threat was loaded with such cruelty that he believed her capable of anything, no matter how sinister. Samuel realized his hands were shaking.

At that, the Knapps grew angry and joined the mix. Oblivious to the true threat before them, they, too, thought they could engage the entity locked inside their daughter, foolish as that was.

"God has you in chains," James interjected before Samuel could counter, his voice filled with false bravado.

"For all my chain, I can knock thee on the head when I please." A deadly threat. "This night, I shall carry her away. *She shall die*." Elizabeth clenched her fists.

"But God is stronger than you," piped Goody Knapp.

"That is a *lie*," the Elizabeth-thing rocketed back, enraged. "I am stronger than God!"

Angry and annoyed, Samuel scolded them for their ignorance. "Fools! Know thy station. Watch your words, lest the devil overtake you if he so wished." His eyes flicked from one to the next then back to the demonized maid.

There are numerous Bible passages about the devil. Samuel knew them all. Many times, he had preached about the fall of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:12. Preached on the demon-possessed man of Gadarenes in the New Testament.

About the great Red Dragon of the Book of Revelation. But those were scriptures, ink and parchment … until now.

Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him? The scripture clapped like thunder in Samuel's thoughts. As a gospel minister, Samuel Willard had read Revelation 13:4 countless times, poured over it in his morning and evening devotions. He had preached it in a hundred sermons. He was intimately familiar with the text. But what he was not familiar with was this—the thing that now stood before him … this foul creature in the form of his housemaid. It seemed the scripture had sprung from the pages, and now Satan, The Wicked One, stood before him, face-to-face. The devil in the flesh … Elizabeth's flesh.

Has anyone walked in mine own shoes ever? Samuel could think of none. Not even among the greatest preachers. He was the first, he figured.

Samuel felt alone, lost. He searched inwardly for answers but found nothing. Frustrated, he walked to the hearth, away from Elizabeth.

"Where is that black rogue gone?" Elizabeth eyed him watchfully, suspicious.

Samuel grabbed the fire iron and speared the burning logs, thoughtful. He poked at the flames, as if some revelation could be found in them, until the fires went blurry in his sight. Samuel Willard was out of options and out of his league. Or was he?

Enough talk. Verbal jousting alone could not wrest the black thing from Elizabeth's soul, Samuel knew. It was toying with them, as a cat paws a mouse before it's devoured. He set the tool down and directed them to pray.

Samuel knelt. The couple followed suit. Elizabeth reacted with swift rage, fierce and anguished.

"Hold your tongue!" she cried. "What are you going to do? You have nothing to do with me!"

Their prayers ascended, growing louder, more desperate.

Elizabeth cupped her ears. “Stop! Black rogue,” she screeched. “*STOOOOOOP!”*

When her cry tapered off, she grew still. Staring down at their bent forms, she grew eerily quiet, waiting. As soon as they took to their feet, Elizabeth mocked them with bitter words and blasphemies.

“Rogues!” The entity scowled. “Your little God cannot save her—”

But then her words were choked. Elizabeth whelped, clutched her windpipe, and staggered off-balance. Cold invisible hands seized her throat, and heated stone warmed the back of her heels. Something had gripped her neck, that was plain. But what it was exactly, Samuel could only guess.

All at once, the flames snarled, and angry sparks shot upward through the stack, like an army of snapping red vipers. The room grew hot as Elizabeth was being dragged backward, toward the awaiting flames. Suddenly, Elizabeth’s visage changed.

The hard lines on her face softened, and her rabid expression melted into that of a frightened child. She clawed clumsily at the unseen fingers at her collar, eyes bulging, wet with fear. Wordless. The warmth at her back now pricked like needles. The devil had threatened to take her life, and it seemed he was holding to his word. Only sooner than expected.

Elizabeth caught on fire. Her hair singed, and the smell of burning flesh penetrated the air.

Samuel sprang into action, tackling her with full force. His nostrils filled with a sour stench.

“Let her go!” he cried toward nothing.

The two landed with a fleshy *thud* at the foot of the mouth, inches from the furnace. Samuel swatted at the flames licking her skull.

Narrowly escaping death, Elizabeth went limp, as the evil hold at last relinquished. And the deep gloom departed from the room, vanished.

Samuel shouted into the air, “God hast proved thee a liar, Satan!” he announced. “He hast preserved her once more.”

It was over in an instant.

Wonderstruck, Samuel and company shot fearful glances at one another, as terror yielded to a collective sense of relief. What the hell just happened? What the hell had they witnessed? It was a vision too extraordinary for words. No one had experienced anything like this. None had encountered evil on such a scale.

Relieved but rattled to the bone, Samuel held Elizabeth in place until she grew still until the pulsing between his ears quieted, until all that could be heard were the flames settling in the hearth.

Some days later, when Samuel enquired about the strange voice, Elizabeth gave an even stranger response.

“The devil entered though my mouth whilst I was going to bed one night,” she told. “He has remained inside me ever since. I can hear him speak but cannot tell in what manner.” Elizabeth paused for a moment, then added, “If ever there were a devil in the world, there is one in me.”

Over the next couple weeks, Elizabeth’s fits tapered off. Although sporadic seizures remained, her speech soon returned and her temper calmed. Before long, the torments subsided, and the devil’s hateful appearances were no longer named. But was Elizabeth Knapp truly possessed? Samuel Willard left the decision to those more “learned, aged, and judicious” among him. Even so, questions remained. Questions, he felt could not be explained otherwise.

Upon hearing that dreaded dialect for the first time, Samuel offered:

I was at the first something daunted & amazed, &
many reluctances I had upon my spirits, which brought

> *mee to a silence and amazement in my spirits, till at last God heard my groans and gave me both refreshment in Christ, and courage.*[17]

But was it the devil who had spoken?

The question would spark controversy among religious and medical scholars for more than a century. But these were not present at the time to see, or experience, such an unsettling thing. For the truth of the matter, we must rely on Samuel's own words, the *actual* eyewitness.

> *The manner of expression I diligently observed, & could not perceive any organ, any instrument of speech… to have any motion at all. Yea, her mouth was sometimes shut without opening, sometimes open without shutting or moving … Wee observed when the voice spake, her throat was swelled formidably as big at least as one's fist.*[18]

While questions remained, some proofs were undeniable; others, a mystery.

> 1) *Elizabeth's speechlessness.* Samuel argues that this could not be pretended, since he, along with others, unsuccessfully tried to unfurl her frozen tongue.

> *… both I & others saw her tongue (as it used to be when she was in some fits, when*

> *speechless) turned up circularly to the roof of her mouth.*[19]

2) *The savage behavior*: Her extreme temper, superhuman strength, and length of seizures could in no way be fabricated. That, Samuel confidently confessed, was "*something diabolical*."

3) *Did Elizabeth actually sign the devil's book?* Admittedly, Samuel found this unknowable.

> *Whither shee have covenanted with the Devill or noe: I thinke this is a case unanswerable, her declarations have been soe contradictorye, one to another, that wee know not what to make of them …*[20]

Racked with uncertainties, Samuel continued to watch Elizabeth as she inched toward recovery. Even though her symptoms were diminishing, the minister was not without reservation. But, was this truly the final stage, or another deceit?

On January 15, 1672, Reverend Samuel shared his final thoughts … and final warning to all.

> *… Her condition is such as administers many doubts; charity would hope the best, love would also fear the worst, but thus much is clear, she is an object of pity, and I desire that all that hear of her would*

compassionate her forlorn state, she is (I question not) a subject of hope, and therefor all means ought to be used for her recovery, she is a monument of divine severity, and the Lord grant that all that see or hear, may fear and tremble: Amen.[21]

S. W.

Samuel Willard, as expected, went on to a luminous career. After Groton was destroyed by Indians in 1676 during King Phillip's war, Willard and his family relocated to Charlestown, Massachusetts. Some two years later, he became minister of Boston's prominent Old South Church. There, he served as pastor for the rest of his days. In addition, he became the acting president of Harvard College. There, his posthumous tome of lectures, *A Compleate Body of Divinity*, was taught for some one hundred years after its publication.

One of the most influential figures of his time, Samuel's counsel was called upon during the infamous Salem Witch Trials, where he firmly argued against the use of spectral evidence. To grave consequences, his judicious views went unheard. A mistake that would lead to one of the darkest chapters in American history.

Samuel's life was one of passion, inspiration, and reverence toward God in Christ. His legacy and influence not only stretched back to the country's dark past but, when he baptized the would-be American revolutionary, Benjamin Franklin, it extended into America's glorious future, laying the foundation for the country's founding fathers to build upon. Samuel Willard died September 12, 1707.

The life of Elizabeth Knapp, however, was not as clear cut. Unfortunately, the rest of her lifetime remains shrouded in mystery.

Historians and genealogists stand divided about the facts. Extant records tell us that Elizabeth Knapp married one Samuel Scripture on September 11, 1674[22] … that she went on to have ten children and lived out her days as a Puritan goodwife, free from the evil that had once haunted her. Elizabeth Knapp lived happily ever after, essentially. Though that ending may be fit for a fairy tale, the truth of the matter may not seem so charming.

Surprisingly, there were two Elizabeth Knapps at the time. First cousins who both lived in Groton. One was born to James and Elizabeth Warren Knapp, which is the Elizabeth of our story. The other was born to William Knapp, James' brother, and Margaret Dean(e). She was about two years younger. And it was *this* Elizabeth some suggest married Samuel Scripture, not the opposite.

Records show Elizabeth Knapp, the bewitched, married Ephraim Philbrick of Groton. However, no marriage date is listed. Lest the two become confused, official records parenthetically state: "she was bewitched in 1671."[23] The odd inclusion leaves little doubt as to which Elizabeth Knapp is meant.

Whatever the case, the name Elizabeth Knapp falls from record in 1674. To say anything more of her existence afterward would be pure speculation. It seems her life, and death, remains as mysterious as the specters that haunted her. Nevertheless, historians surmise that the afflicted Elizabeth Knapp died shortly after marriage, childless.

F I N I S.

Chapter Three

Spirit of the Witch

"By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."
— William Shakespeare

A VOICE SHOULD HAVE A body; anyone would agree. That's what I thought … before one called from beyond the shadows.

The decaying townhouse was lifeless. The green sign opposite the cul de sac read, "*Peconic Court*." But, by all appearances, it might as well showed "*Mockingbird Lane,"* home to the *Munsters*. Bleak and dreary, it stood in stark contrast to the rest of the homes on the block, with their lush lawns and colorful flowers.

It was abandoned.

Outside, a weathered wooden fence lined the property. The front section leaned inward with its door hanging crookedly from a single hinge, creaking sullenly in the breeze. No blade had touched the lawn for months. Neither did water, apparently. On the left side of the home, tufts of brown grass stretched toward the backyard, course and crunchy underfoot.

How the key lime tree survived the decay was anyone's guess. The property's only saving grace sat right behind the weakened fence, at the head of the driveway. Its small fruits hung in green-yellow clusters. The sugary-sweet fragrance permeated the landscape, despite its desertion. A bright spot in a dismal place.

The townhouse rose from the landscape like a cemetery sepulcher, two stories tall, haunting and gloomy. But it was the bay windows that were most unsettling. Large and square, the pair jutted from either side of the top

floor and watched over the grounds like two hollowed eyes—vacant, unlit, eerie.

Sheets of dead palm fronds buried the entrance walkway. Aged roots from a nearby tree had upended the square stones beneath, making each step unsteady and awkward. Each turned a sickly algae-green from the humidity, much like the white door, with green-black marks streaking its surface like molten wax, the beveled glass at its center hazed with grime. Cocoons of some foul insect littered its front.

Inside was heartbreak.

The musty odor indoors did not offend. The air was thick and moist. No human had stirred the air in some time, only the daddy longlegs that had since claimed the corners as home. A faint note of acetone lingered between the beige walls, a hint of the owner's profession—nail tech.

A trail of toys littered the hallway that lead to the living room, shunned. A shiny green tricycle lay about the tan tiles like a dead thing, void of the joy it once brought. *Does anyone still live here? It looks like they never left.*

A country-style oak kitchen set occupied an adjacent nook. Unpaid bills, junk mail, and miscellaneous things cluttered the tabletop. The decorative sign above the entrance read, "*Italiana Cucina*."

Colorful drawings scattered the living room floor, covered in dust. And more toys. Everywhere. A box of firsts sat forsaken in the corner—a baby's first birthday photos, first communion, first breath. All left, heartlessly.

An oak entertainment center dominated the main wall of the living room; a comfy brown sofa along the other. The glass coffee table was cluttered with various items—tumbled Matchbox cars, framed family photos, a half-burned vanilla-scented candle, a bowl of Hershey's miniature chocolates, half-filled crossword puzzles. There were also numerous

tabloids—*The Enquirer, The Star, The Sun*. July's *Cosmopolitan* was spread to page 98, "*Talking Tricks that Draw Him.*" Singer Rhianna donned the cover. A baby photo of a boy wearing a tan corduroy cap with bright brown eyes and a gummy smile, immortal joy cased in cheap plastic—the son.

It was surreal. It appeared as if they had left on some small errand, as if they might return at any moment. But, sadly, they never did. It was disheartening. Nothing hinted that they had skipped town. Nothing said: *No one lives here anymore.* Nothing yet. It looked like they had never left.

Still, the walls spoke otherwise. The home gave off an empty, sunken feeling. Or maybe it was a natural reaction to the strange surroundings. Whatever it was, it hung in the air like the eerie residue of some homicide scene. And although the house was empty, there was an inescapable sense of being watched—eyes staring from everywhere, and nowhere.

The feeling grew stronger while moving up the stairs.

Such was the setting that greeted me that fall day when I first moved into my sister's home. A round of layoffs at a news publication had changed my employment status for the worse. No longer able to afford rent, I had abandoned my lofty downtown apartment for the abandoned home out west, near South Florida's famed polo grounds. Far too west for my liking.

Once there, it wasn't long before the paranormal activity began. Around December.

The foul odor crept upstairs around midnight. It had started somewhere on the ground floor, like that of a gas leak. Roused from sleep, its phantasmal fingers coaxed me into the gloom below.

A stair creaked as I descended the blackened stairwell; the carpet soft beneath my toes.

Downstairs, lights on, I sniffed at the air searching for the source. The garbage can? No, empty. It was coming from somewhere overhead, higher.

But, where?

The stink was grotesque but seemed strangely familiar, as though I had smelled it before. Somehow, intuitively, I knew the source. Even so, I rejected the notion. I exchanged my gut instinct for a more plausible explanation. The one I had conjured was too damn nonsensical.

I *knew*.

I climbed a chair from the kitchen table and whiffed the ceiling vent above. Here.

I could feel the rotted breath on my face, billowing through the metallic slates, filling my nostrils with a sulfurous stench. A vapory gust of rotted carcass and sweaty socks and an ill-defined chemical note. A bouquet of decomposing things. *What the hell is that?*

Rat? No. I had smelled dead rat before. It had climbed into the attic of my father's house and died. It had lain up there for months, gathering stench before it was finally discovered buried beneath a mound of pink fiberglass.

This was worse. Much worse.

I *knew*.

It's human nature to refuse to accept a harsh reality, even when the truth stares you in the face. That is especially true when fear is involved. Mostly, when fear is involved. It's classic denial. And that's exactly what happened when I climbed from the chair to cut power to the air conditioner.

The circuit breaker was located in a small room under the stairs. It was piled waist-deep with forsaken toys and discarded junk. Otherwise, the box was easy to reach. The bold, black arrows that pointed to the big, black switch made it hard to miss. On the antiseptic gray frame, the letters *AC* were scrawled in black Sharpie. Only an idiot could miss it.

Clack! The metallic clang jangled through the home.

Switched off, I returned to the vent, but the rank air continued to gush forth on its own, warm death on my skin, unaided by electrical means.

At that moment, I realized the exhaust was unearthly, unholy. It was demonic. *I knew*.

But that was only a taste of things to come, a whiff.

3:33 a.m.

The bedroom upstairs gave me an uneasy feeling. Even from the start, I felt like an unwanted guest. At times, that awareness fluttered my stomach like angry butterflies. But this night was more unnerving than most. Something dangerous hung in the air, like chaos on the brink of eruption. I could feel it crawling along my skin like a hundred skinny spider legs.

Restless, I watched the ceiling fan spin slowly overhead, its breath pulsating on my skin. The chain tinkled with a soft metallic note, circling in the motorized breeze. The room was warm. The sultry Florida heat demanded it stay that way, even in colder temperatures.

Pale moonlight spilled through cracks of the vertical blinds, which clacked together softly. They poorly concealed a sliding glass door that opened to a small unkempt balcony, where dead leaves and rusty, quart-sized paint cans covered Mediterranean tile.

The balcony looked over the sullen backyard. A white fountain in the shape of seashell sat in the center. It was mottled sickly green and leaned like a crooked man on a cane, sinking into the boggy earth. It projected a sense of loneliness. Even the birds had forgotten to drink from its murky, grey-green waters.

A discarded tricycle was surrendered by the thick brush at the corner of the property, where the fences met, where broken toys, coloring books, and used diapers lay half-buried in the muck. The hidden heap smelled of shit

and mildew and wetted black soil. No telling how long the stuff remained there, rotting.

A gap in the fence line now made for a convenient shortcut for neighborhood children. *A witch lives here*, they must have thought as they hurried through.

3:33 a.m.

The night wore on. And the thought of the strange odor kept me on edge, kept me awake. There was a current of tension in the room. And the fact that I was alone made it all the more unnerving. What if something were to happen? Who would know? There would be no one at my side should some haunt molest my sleep.

The chain tinkled softly overhead. I listened to its hypnotic jingle until rendered unconscious. But sleep was short-lived. It was broken when a strange voice roused me in the witching hour. It came from some ethereal place, like an echo from a deep well, as it called my name.

"*MI ... I ... I ... CHAEL ... L ... L ... L.*"

The ghostly voice slithered long through the darkness. It was part whisper, part hiss. It winded serpentine and irksome. Eerie. It sounded far away yet dangerously close, lethal.

Even in a sleepy stupor, I understood it to be no dream. Someone—something—had called my name. From somewhere.

Annoyed and half-afraid, I pulled the sheets tight and turned on my side. I listened intently, unaware of what might happen should I fall back asleep.

3:33 a.m.

The bedside clock blinked red. On. Off. On. Off. Its crimson flash pulsed upon the ceiling and walls, filling the room with an eerie glow, made brighter by the mirrored closet. *Did the power go out?*

Suddenly, I was aware that I wasn't alone, that someone was in the room. Some … presence.

Watching.

From beneath my lids, I then detected a sudden shift in the light. A darting shadow drank the shade in a single flash. My eyes shot open.

There, before the fog of sleep could clear, a figure in black filled my eyes.

It loomed at my bedside, tall, gaunt, and gangly. With crooked shoulders, it lurched overhead like some demented doctor bent over his patient, staring down with cold malevolence, head slightly cocked.

It wore a long, death-black cloak. And sunken deep into the hollow of its hood, in the pitch recesses, was the semblance of a face. What could be made out was long, thin, and grossly misshapen, hideous. Its mouth formed a broad, villainous grin, pleased with its malice. Its eyes, hidden deep in shadow, were fathomless pits of gloom, jet-black and lifeless. No light could be seen in them, not even a glint. And the melted edges about the sockets only amplified the horror. It stood magnificent in its dread as it spied my form.

What was it? The grim figure was not a shadow. Neither was it a dream. That much was clear. It had dimensional features to its almost physical form. Somewhat transparent and somewhat solid, the entity was both spirit and body all at once. An angel of death.

It spoke no words. No need. The inexorable hatred emanating from its presence spoke volumes. Hot hate charged the atmosphere.

Black rays from an ever blacker sun penetrated every bone and sinew of my being, as if I might burst into flames. Bands of contempt suffocated my senses like a rolling heatwave. Its animosity was palpable, pervasive, paralyzing. It felt as though I was the most despised thing in the world. Nothing could be more reviled. It was a perfect hate.

3:33 ... ***3:33*** *... 3:33 ...* ***3:33*** *...*

The clock pulsed with alarm. Or maybe it was the drumming in my chest. It was hard to tell the difference between the two. Motionless, my eyes scrolled the length of its robe. Untold layers of gauzy strips formed its edges, long and rectangular. The dusty strands, grey-black upon ever deepening black, waved with a watery motion, dreamily, as though under the sea. The layers beneath were blacker still. Despite the wraith's dread, there was a certain beauty to its movement.

It's hands, however, held no beauty. Only malice. Deep malice. One hand draped at its side, at the end a lanky and long-limbed arm. The other extended from the folds of its sleeve. Startled, my eyes gaped at the sight. It was more birdlike than human. I counted five digits. Freakishly long and pale, they were mottled ash-grey, with layers of scaly ridges, like the shape and texture of a pigeon's claw. Only, much larger, and much more menacing. Long, arched talons, extending from its bulbous tips, replaced fingernails, black and wickedly sharp. It was creeping up my chest, slowly, toward my throat.

I felt the claw-like nails on my skin, felt its touch. Its waxy tips, like sharpened knives, ran ever so gently along my chest, taunting, teasing, inching upward. Its face was a mask of simpering mockery. Whatever the aim, it was drawing a sick pleasure from its menace. Somehow, this black thing had entered the living world, and I was able to feel its touch as natural as any other. I had seen numerous apparitions and ghostly things in the past

but had never once felt a touch. To feel it—physically feel it—was a horrifying first.

Alcatraz. An odd thought. It tore through my mind like a bullet through a paper target. A prisoner who had been locked in the "Hole," cell 14-D, had reportedly cried that someone else was in the cell with him. He had screamed, and screamed, and screamed. When guards finally had opened the door, he had been found dead. They had also found mysterious strangulation marks around his neck, a spectral assailant. In that instant, I feared I might suffer a similar fate.

I attempted to cry aloud, but the words lodged between the walls of my throat. All that came was a feeble whelp that died in silence. I was powerless, paralyzed with fear, and any hope for rescue was pointless. The fact that I was alone offered no solace, either. Under its spell, the shade somehow choked the words before they could escape. But words were not all it meant to choke, evidently.

After some time, my tongue was loosed and words broke free. Desperately, I cried out to Jesus Christ. In an instant, at the mention of the Son of God, the menace vanished with a powdery black mist, fine as dust. It lingered in the air for a brief moment before fading into the darkness. The room pulsed black to red, black to red.

3:33 ... 3:33

How long the vision lasted, I couldn't guess. Maybe seconds. Maybe hours. Whatever the span, it was too long.

Released from its power, I bolted upright at once. With ragged breaths, I anxiously scanned the room for the invader, suspicious and greatly relieved. My senses had scarcely connected before I cried into the empty air, to myself, to God, "What the fuck was that?"

I didn't expect an answer, but when one came, I was truly surprised.

No sooner had I spoken when an inner voice affirmed, *That was witchcraft.*

The words were not spoken audibly but rushed into my thoughts with commanding force. The way a blast of wind overwhelms the trees and blows everything in its path for a moment, so did the expression storm into my mind and through my being. It came with great authority. It was placid and terrible and majestic all at once. The voice of a rushing waterfall, voice of a King.

With that, the darkness vanquished. It was over in a blink. The cruel haunt had ended as suddenly as it had begun. What followed was a deep sense of peace. It filled the room, quelled the dread. The voice quieted the fear and chaos that had since erupted, like a gentle stream flowing over stones, powerfully tranquil. Such a voice could only be but One.

God.

Chapter Four

Apartment 833

"Her feet go down to death; her steps lay hold of hell."
— Proverbs 5:5

THE CITY LIGHTS BELOW THE POSH, eighth-floor apartment shown as crown jewels. Heavy humidity crowned them with a coronal glow. They could be seen through the floor-to-ceiling glass door, which led to the balcony, blinking and shimmering as far as the eye could see, into the unbroken south. The *ring-a-ding* of the train tracks and its passing trains below could still be heard through the thick glass, albeit softer and fainter.

Sheer midnight-blue drapes cascaded ten feet on either side. They fanned gently onto the white tile beneath. Three copper Moroccan lanterns, set with stained glass, hung from long chains at the corner of the ceiling. Each had a burning candle inside. The flames splashed a tapestry of warm colors. Odd shapes of pale orange, green, and blue pulsated softly upon the back wall, as though a living, breathing thing. And when caught in the reflection of the wall-to-wall pane, the ambient glare mingled with the lights below to form a kaleidoscope of transparent hues.

The view was dramatic. Even romantic. The impressive apartment with its downtown views was the kind of place women found wildly impressive. And I took advantage of its charms.

The minimally decorated space, with its Moroccan flare, played host to numerous dates. It had often got me in trouble. After some questionable rendezvous, I decided to change my ways. But when I began to wrangle my desires, my decision was met with iron resistance. Lust and darkness would not let go so easily I would realize. Evil sought to keep me in its clutches.

One hot night in June, sleep proved elusive. All alone, I tossed and turned on my bed. Left to right, right to left … and left to right until an unfamiliar face filled my vision. Suddenly, to my surprise, a woman stared back at me, face-to-face. Her appearance was stunning, shocking. She lay on her side with her head comfortably on the pillow, eyes level with mine. The pillow creased with her impression where her head lay.

She wore a white nightgown. And with the sheets pulled halfway, the outline of her slender frame could be seen beneath the furry brown bear comforter.

She propped her head up on one hand. "Hello," she chimed with a slightly seductive note, eyes searching mine for a reaction. The stranger's voice was earthy and pleasant, willing.

Oh, she's friendly. Cute, too. Her casual confidence had taken me aback. Oddly, her features resembled two girls I knew. Whoever this was, she seemed a bit too relaxed for bedding a perfect stranger.

She was attractive, about mid-twenties, with honey brown hair pulled back into a ponytail. The soft wisps that framed her face fell delicately into her big, hazel eyes, round, bright, and welcoming. A bit too welcoming. A glint flashed in them, and a slight seductive grin brushed her lips.

But, who was she? And, how did she get in my bed? Could this be a figment of my sexualized imagination? Haunt.

The nameless visitor was not a ghost. Unlike a ghost, with its see-through qualities, she had complete physical features—solid, fleshly. Neither was she dreamed. She was real. In every sense of the word. The indent on the pillow and her desirous curve beneath the sheets evidenced that. That, and the way the silver moonlight brushed her olive skin and glistening rose-pink lips. All real.

She waited expectedly for a reaction. Eye-to-eye, my reflection lingered in her sassing gaze. It was the kind of stare that said, *Well ... whatcha gonna do? I'm waiting.* Temptation beckoned. *Dare I bite?*

Part of me wanted her. The other part resisted, for some weird reason. The train horn below blared with caution. A flash of fear swept over me. What monstrous thing waited behind her kiss? Would the risk be worth the reward? There was no way to tell. For an instant, I thought to yield to her charms … until a realization struck my senses.

I had gone to bed *alone*. That much was certain. Another thing certain was this: She was no woman. She was a wolf in lady's clothing. A devil.

Succubus.

The nocturnal she-demon had not come for pleasure but to seduce, to molest, to thwart my progress toward piety. I was not the first to encounter such a lovely evil, nor would I be the last. Throughout history, men have been victimized by the insatiable entity in their sleep, especially the devout. Likewise, women have been known to have intercourse with incubi, the male counterpart.

According to Heinrich Kramer's *The Malleus Maleficarum—The Hammer of Witches*—these unholy spirits collect human semen, gathered from a succubus, in which to inseminate female victims. Demonic impregnation. Another view is that both demons are one in the same.

Demon-on-human sex has been recorded throughout history. In fact, The Bible speaks of women bearing children to fallen angels. Impregnated, these spawned demon offspring. The evil union created an abominable race known as *Nephilim*, a race of giants who God ultimately destroyed in the Noah's Flood. The Book of Genesis declares, *"There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto*

the daughters of men, and they bear children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown."[24]

For the succubus, terror and ecstasy go in hand in hand. She is equally frightening and alluring. The night creature terrifies her victims while, at the same time, gives unimaginable sexual pleasures. But her charms come at a cost. The wanton fiend has been known to cause harm, ruin, insanity, and even death.

Fortunately, neither happened. Her nefarious intent came to naught when my senses woke. At my rebuke, in the name of Jesus, the sheets flattened in a blink, as the femme fatale dissolved into the bed. That same instant, her face faded as tiny droplets of mist, collapsing into itself, melting as fine dust where her head once lay, as the pillow smoothed to normal, without a crease.

Fear had not overwhelmed as much as expected. Nonetheless, the visitation had made me restless, and I climbed from bed to study the lights beyond the glass wall until they blurred together as one.

Section Two

Dark Forces, Dirty Deeds

Evil spirits are as numerous as the stars. They come in many forms, each with its own nefarious role and function.

Discover the inner workings of the most dreaded spirits wreaking hell on earth today.

Chapter Five

Fear: A Deadly Contagion

Heavy thoughts tonight
And they aren't Snow White
Dreams of war, dreams of liars
Dreams of dragon's fire
And the things that will bite.
— Metallica

IN 1991, METALLICA RELEASED THEIR megalithic metal anthem "Enter Sandman," off their self-titled fifth album. The song was inspired by Scandinavian folklore. In the children's story, the Sandman is a mythical character who sprinkles magical sand into the eyes of sleeping children to make them dream. The song juxtaposes children's innocent bedtime prayers with insidious nightmares. A play on one's greatest fears.

But fear is not child's play. There are no age limits when it comes ghoulies and ghosties and monsters under the bed. Fear has many forms. Some are natural; others evil.

Even so, everyone fears something at some point. It's normal. Spiders, failure, rejection, being alone, and death are just some of the most common phobias.

Not surprisingly, it's the existence of demons, ghosts, and evil powers that are most widely feared. For good reason. Demons exist. And their malevolence should not be underestimated.

When most people think of spirits, they think of ghosts, haunts, or apparitions. Hardly are they interpreted as demons. But that is exactly what they are—exiled spirits, or fallen angels. Devils.

Demons take many forms. Their supernatural abilities allow them to deceptively transform into wandering spirits, strange figures, and holy apparitions. Even angels. Moreover, they can mimic the exact likenesses, mannerisms, and voices of departed relatives or loved ones.

Though they assume many shapes, these spirit powers can best be identified by their roles or functions, by their inflicted destructions. For example, a spirit of greed may cause one to deceive another out of their life savings; or a lying spirit may sow distrust and division among families or groups. But among the myriad of invisible entities, there is none so crippling as the Spirit of Fear.

Fear is a demon spirit.

Knowing how to recognize its destructive influence could mean the difference between freedom and enslavement.

Life and death.

Fear arises from a sense of impending danger. It's how the body alerts you to either confront or escape threats. An internal alarm system, if you will. It's what's known as the fight-or-flight response. In that sense, fear may be good. Another, disastrous. It can cripple your life and make daily living insufferable.

Intense fears and chronic worry can create a host of health issues. For starters, anxieties can trigger nervous feelings and panic attacks that cause hyperventilation, depression, headaches, insomnia, and social isolation. It can also increase the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease, and lead to a variety of social and anxiety disorders, including General Panic Disorder, OCD and PTSD.

Fear is pandemic.

But, while fear and anxiety have been studied meticulously from a medical standpoint, there is often little spoken about the spiritual dimension

of fear. Far too little.

The New Testament, in 2 Timothy 1:7, describes fear as a spirit. "*For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."*

And another, 1 John 4:18, states, "*Fear involves torment*."

In other words, fear is a spirit being. It is not of human origin. Fear is a demon spirit sent to torment unwitting lives. But how does it enter one's life? Moreover, have you fallen under its influence?

For many, one root cause may be a low sense of self-worth. This is generally the result of some deeper inward issue that often starts in childhood. This issue then becomes a source of fear and anxiety throughout life. And, over time, a false belief system about oneself develops. In turn, an individual's sense of identity becomes based on performance. They derive value and acceptance by what others think of them. It's the yardstick by which worth is measured. It is also a doorway for demon spirits.

Most who struggle with this value system share one common mantra—their internal dialogue repeatedly tells them, "*You're not good enough*." Whether parental figures, negative childhood experiences, or societal constructs, they are consumed with a sense of worthlessness and defeat. They feel like they never measure up to those around them. This belief can last well into adulthood.

It's a lie. A deep-rooted one from the Spirit of Fear.

Anxiety and fear act as entry points for such spirits. With such damaging effects on your mind and body, no wonder demons love fear tactics. If the root issue remains unresolved, then this fearful spirit will leave you worried to death—literally.

When it comes to controlling the lives of millions, fear is a matchless foe.

Demons feed on fear. *Yours*.

Chapter Six

Shadows of Depression

"Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow."
— Thomas Campion

ON FEBRUARY 11, 1963, A young mother seals the rooms between her and her two sleeping children with tape, towels, and cloth. She enters the kitchen and turns the gas oven on. Around 4:30 a.m., she opens its door and thrusts her head deep into its mouth, inhaling the deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Hours later, the woman is found dead. The victim is famed American poet and author, Sylvia Plath. She is thirty years old. The cause of her suicide? Clinical depression.

Depression is a global scourge.

The world is a sad place, it seems. Depression today affects more than sixteen million adults in the U.S., according to the National Institute of Mental Health. It's also the leading cause of disability among ages 15-44, as well as injuries and illnesses for people around the world.

For many, life is a beautiful thing. They love their lives, family and friends; they enjoy their work and have interests that make life worth living. They are essentially happy. But for those who suffer depression, life is not so happy-go-lucky. Life for them has become grey, dull, and melancholic. They're plagued with feelings of despair, listlessness, and heavy fatigue, clouded with a dark, foggy gloom, shiftless clouds skulking above a restless sea. They have become empty shells, a body without spirit. Ghosts.

Everyone gets the blues at times. Whether its divorce, death of a loved one, or losing a job, difficult situations can take a toll on your mental and

emotional wellbeing. It can make you feel sad, lonely, and scared, full of uncertainty. Even so, these are normal reactions to life's bitter moments.

However, for those with severe or chronic depression, these emotions can last months and even years. And it only worsens over time. It can lead to sickness, despair, and even suicide.

In the case of Sylvia Plath, the acclaimed poet had a history of clinical depression. It lasted most of her adult life. While her suicide was successful, it had not been her only attempt. A year prior, she had driven her car into a river to end her life.

Still, the tentacles of depression reached even further back than that. In 1953, about a decade earlier, Plath had crawled under her house and took her mother's sleeping pills. She had been found three days later under the crawl space. The incident would become her first medically documented suicide attempt. She had been twenty-one.

But, while major advances in the fields of neurology have been made, experts remain unclear about the cause of depression. What can be said is this: It is more complex than a brain chemical imbalance. Trauma, illness, stressful events, and medications all can affect mood and trigger depression.

Nevertheless, severe depression may not only be a medical condition. It may be spiritual. The possibility should not be ruled out. Many get sad at times—it's natural. But sometimes, it's supernatural. Sometimes, it's a Spirit of Depression, and a slew of malefic powers.

This demon is marked by an inexplicable sense of hopelessness and weighty, unnatural fatigue. Heavy as hell. It renders treatments, medication, and therapy useless. Because this type of depression is not earthly.

It's demonic.

That's why people can't seem to break free no matter what they do. They just can't "get with it." That's because they've been enslaved by its

power. And once swallowed by hopelessness, suicide becomes a reasonable option to end its torment and misery.

The Spirit of Depression hardly works alone. It works in tandem with a host of demonic principalities. These include spirits of despair, discouragement, hopelessness, dejection, insomnia, death, and suicide. Small wonder so many lives are captive to its spell.

Demons of depression are among us, and your sorrow is their greatest joy.

Chapter Seven

Pharma Frenzy

"And now, my beauties, something with poison in it, I think.
With poison in it, but attractive to the eye and soothing to the smell.
Poppies, poppies, poppies will put them to sleep."
— The Wicked Witch of the West, *The Wizard of Oz, 1939*

ON NOVEMBER 28, 2001, CHRISTOPHER Pittman waited for his grandparents to go to sleep, then went upstairs and shot them both in the head with a .410 shotgun. Dead. Afterward, he set the house ablaze and stole the couple's truck. Once captured, he told authorities he was kidnapped. He later confessed to the murders. He was twelve years old.

In court, the adolescent struggled to explain why he had murdered his grandparents. "*When I was lying in my bed that night*," he testified, "*I couldn't sleep because my voice in my head kept echoing through my mind telling me to kill them*." He had been angry at his grandfather for

disciplining him earlier that day for fighting with another student on the school bus.

He recalled, "*I got up, got the gun, and I went upstairs, and I pulled the trigger. Through the whole thing, it was like watching your favorite TV show. You know what is going to happen, but you can't do anything to stop it*."

Days before the killings, his psychiatrist doubled the dose of his medication—Zoloft. One of the most prescribed anti-depressant drugs in America.

Pittman's family believed the drug had turned him into a monster. His lawyers argued that the drug's disturbing side effects aided the killings.

In an interview with CBS's *48 Hours, Prescription for Murder,* Christopher told, "*It's just like these voices in my head, just echoing in my head, getting louder and louder and faster*."

When asked what the voices said, he plainly stated, "*Kill*." They were "*strong enough so that I did it*," he added. "*I thought it was all a dream*."

The event shocked South Carolina residents and gained national media attention.

While the story is equally tragic and chilling, it's hardly an isolated incident. Similar cases have been reported throughout Britain and Australia.

In one of the most heartrending crimes in modern history, Texas' Andrea Yates drowned all five of her children, aged six months to seven years, in the bathtub. The embattled mother insisted that dark voices commanded her to kill them.

Yates had been taking the anti-depressant Effexor. And over the course of several years, she had become increasingly psychotic.

At her 2006 murder re-trial, Yates' longtime friend, Debbie Holmes, testified, "*She asked me if I thought Satan could read her mind and if I*

believed in demon possession."

And Dr. George Ringholz, after evaluating Yates for two days, recalled an experience she had after the birth of her first child. "*What she described was feeling a presence ... Satan ... telling her to take a knife and stab her son Noah*," Ringholz said. He then added that Yates' delusion at the time of the murders was not only that she had to kill her children to save them, but that Satan had entered her, and that she had to be executed in order to kill Satan.

In another case, eighteen-year-old, Kurt Danysh, spoke of his emotional state at the time he shot his own father to death in 1996, stating, "*I didn't realize I did it until after it was done. This might sound weird, but it felt like I had no control of what I was doing, like I was left there, just holding a gun*." The murder occurred about two weeks after starting Prozac.

No doubt, today's potent prescription drugs have disturbing side effects. But are they a prescription for murder? In Christopher Pittman's case, the known "*adverse drug reactions*" to Zoloft, according to the FDA-approved label, include mania, insomnia, anxiety, agitation, confusion, amnesia, depression, paranoid reaction, psychosis, hostility, delirium, hallucinations, abnormal thinking, depersonalization, and lack of emotion, among others. Similar drugs include suicidal thoughts and behavior, abnormal bleeding, nightmares, and death.

Many users have reported psychological and interpersonal issues, expressed sexual difficulties, emotional numbness, less care for others, and suicidal impulses, to name a few.

With so many harmful side effects, it begs the question: How are these mind-altering drugs allowed on the market? How do they even pass FDA approval?

It's senseless.

What other product so dangerous could dare exist in the marketplace? Could you imagine such claims on children's toys? Or food? Imagine if this was an acceptable practice in the automobile industry. What if the perfect car came with faulty brakes, a sticking gas pedal, or an engine that might catch fire? Would you buy that car with so many risks?

No! It would be suicide.

Today, the U.S. faces an epidemic opioid crisis. According to the Center of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost 450,000 people died between 1999–2008 from an overdose involving prescription and illicit opioids.[25]

Still, even amidst an alarming death toll, drug companies continue to profit.

It's staggering. Yet, pharmaceutical drug use is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to antiquity, its roots steeped in pagan ritual and mysticism. In fact, our modern term *pharmacy* stems from the ancient Greek *pharmekeia,* which means, "*The use or administering of drugs, poisoning, sorcery, magical arts, often in connection with idolatry and fostered by it.*"[26] A related term*, pharmakeus*, defines it as, *"A person using drug-based incantations or drugging religious enchantments, a practitioner who mixes up distorted religious potions, like a sorcerer-magician."*[27]

Pharmaceutical use, by its very nature, was synonymous with witchcraft, sorcery, and the occult. The spiritual connection between them is undeniable, inseverable. Perhaps they still are today.

Ancient potions and today's drugs are wedded by this one bond …

The opium poppy.

The main source of opium, the mind-altering plant, was the key ingredient used in ancient rituals and ceremonies. Likewise, it is the same ingredient found in many of today's pharmaceuticals.

Many civilizations have recognized the hypnotic effects of the poppy. The earliest reference to its cultivation dates to about 3,400 B.C., in Mesopotamia. The Sumerians referred to it as "Hul Gil," the "joy plant." It later flourished among the Mediterranean cultures. The Ancient Greeks named it "opion," where it obtained its modern name.

Favored for its euphoric effects, pagan religions used it for ceremonial and ritualistic sex, idol worship, and child sacrifice. Egyptians typically restricted its use to priests, magicians, and warriors. Witches and other occultists employed it in potions and incantations. Its hallucinogenic powers altered the conscious to induce visions, cast spells, divine the future, and communicate with the dead—demons.

In ancient Greece, poppy was regarded as a magical or poisonous plant. It was used to venerate mythological deities associated with sleep and death: Hypnos (god of sleep), Nyx (Night), and Thantos (god of death). Each was depicted wreathed with poppies or carrying them in their hands.

It is not known exactly when "poppy juice" was first used, though it was known in the fourth century B.C. Classical writers had described its use and effects in their writings. Pain relieving and narcotic, it was consumed in various ways. It could be mixed with wine, inhaled as vapors, smoked, and even formed into pills.

According to historian, Pliny, *"tablets are prepared from powdered seeds, and are taken in milk as an hypnotic."*[28] Others mention that its juice mixed with hemlock induced a speedy and painless death. For instance, euthanasia was common on the island of Keos. To avoid the pains

and sicknesses of old age, it was customary to commit suicide at a certain age with "juice of the poppy" or hemlock.

Renowned Greek physician, Galen, offers:

> *Opium is the strongest of the drugs, which numb the senses and induce a deadening sleep; its effects are produced when it is soaked in boiling water, taken up on a flock of wool, and used as a suppository; at the same time some can be spread over the forehead and in the nostrils ...*[29]

Today's opioids share a connection to its dark, occultic past. One of mind alteration, numbness, sedation, suicide, and death. The stupefying effects experienced by ancient cultures are strangely similar today. Perhaps even the same.

Nowadays, Turkey, India, Afghanistan, and Australia are among the top growers of the opium poppy. It's widely cultivated for U.S. pharmaceutical industries, to process into morphine, codeine, OxyContin, Vicodin, and similar pain killers and medications. Synthetic opioids, like Fetanyl, are mixed with heroin and cocaine.

While opium today is not widely used for pagan rituals, it cannot be severed from its occultic roots. A strong spiritual connection still exists. In fact, poppy can still be found in modern witchcraft. Wiccans include poppy seeds in various types of spells for fertility, love, luck, fortune, invisibility, domination, control, and other incantations.

Like centuries past, its use opens the door to the spirit realm. It somehow removes the protective barrier between the natural and spiritual

worlds, leaving opioid users vulnerable to evil influences, voices. Commands.

Pain killers like OxyContin produce a kind of temporary zombification that allow dark forces to seduce altered minds. Benumbed, they become defenseless against the drug's witchery, incapable of resisting malevolent impulses. That's why users are compelled to commit unspeakable acts against their own will. Evil things that would otherwise never come to mind.

For this reason, many hear voices while under its spell. Not all voices are the result of mental illness. Not all are crazy, or paranoid, or delusional, or schizophrenic, or any other such label given. Some voices are not psychological. They are spiritual. They are real. They are the voices and demands of demon spirits. It is past time to take such claims seriously.

Satan exists. Demons are real. Psychiatrics may have their place, but not everything can be explained or fixed with a pill. It is a spiritual condition, supernatural. And a spiritual condition cannot be remedied by natural means.

America doesn't have a drug crisis. It has a spiritual crisis. Insidious powers are at work behind today's drug companies. The same spirits of *pharmekeia* that operated in ancient times are alive today. Even more so, it seems.

Today, these dark forces operate through those who cultivate, produce, market, distribute, and prescribe the deadly potions. It works through those who make it and those who take it.

This 21st century plague will not be contained through laws, treatments, and feigned bureaucratic interventions, who are tied to their profits. Our modern-day sorcerers, along with their political protectors, must be held

accountable for the lives they have destroyed. To kill a snake, you must cut off its head.

Demons love drugs but love your demise more.

Chapter Eight

Witchcraft—A Deadly Allure

"Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble."
— William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

September 15, 1692

AMID THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS, teenager Mary Daniel's deposition against Margaret Scott was entered into court as evidence. She had accused the aged widow Scott of performing witchcraft against her.

> *I was taken very ill again all over & felt a great pricking in ye soles of my feet, and after a while I saw apparently the shape of Margaret Scott, who, as I was sitting in a chair by ye fire pulled me with ye chair, down backward to ye ground, and tormented and pinched me very much, and I saw her go away at ye door, in which fit I was dumb and so continued till ye next morning, finding a great load and heaviness upon my tongue …*[30]

She continued to explain suffering Scott's spectral attacks over multiple nights.

> *… There appeared to me the shape of some woman, who seemed to look and speak most fiercely and angrily, and beat, pinch'd and afflicted me very sorely telling me I should not have said so, or told such things…. In one*

> *fitt (upon ye beginning it) I thought I saw Goody Jackson, and widow Scott come walking into the chamber with (their) staves, one of (them) came & sat upon me so (that) I could not stir.… The last fitt I had was upon ye last Sabbath day, in which I saw ye shapes of four women or five, of whom widow Scott was one, ye rest I knew not, nor knew (that) any did hurt me, unless (said) widow Scott.*

About a week later, on September 22, 1692, Scott and seven others were hanged for witch crimes at Gallows Hill.

While numerous witch suspects were executed at Salem, witchcraft itself didn't die there. It is still alive today. America is steeped in the dark arts. In fact, it's so prevalent that most barely see it as witchcraft at all. Partly because it has been glamorized by the entertainment industry.

Through mass media, the witch and her dark doings have been etched deep into the American psyche. No longer to be feared, she has become a cultural norm. As a result, society has embraced all forms of evil, unknowingly.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wicked Witch of the West is arguably the most iconic witch portrayal in movie history. The hideous green hag, with her hooked nose and pointy black hat, has become the prominent figure of our imaginations, nightmares.

When it comes to villainous witches, Disney has no equal. In the 20th century, it has almost single-handedly shaped the perception of the witch. The company's litany of wicked antagonists has provoked fear for generations: *Snow White's* Evil Queen (Old Hag) … Maleficent of *Sleeping*

Beauty … Madam Mim from *The Sword in the Stone*. All have helped define the witch's imagined appearance.

Today, the witch has had a makeover. Gone is the old green hag. It has been replaced by young, attractive sirens who make witchcraft seem alluring, charming, sexy.

Witchcraft has become sexualized and captivating. Its true threat has been reduced to a mere form of amusement. But witchcraft is deeper than that, sicker, darker.

Throughout history, witchcraft has been used to inflict harm, sickness, torture, and revenge on unsuspecting victims. Even murder.

Harry Potter is an undeniable cult phenomenon. Author J.K. Rowling's magical storytelling has opened to children and audiences everywhere a world of wizardly wonder. But in the eyes of International Association of Exorcists' former president, Father Gabriele Amorth, it opened them to something else—a world of devilish spirits.

Said to have performed 160,000 exorcisms during his lifetime, he believed reading the series opened children's minds to dabbling with the occult and black magic. *"Behind Harry Potter hides the signature of the king of the darkness, the devil."*[31]

Rowling's books, he asserted, attempted to make a false distinction between black and white magic when, in fact, the distinction "*does not exist, because magic is always a turn to the devil*."

Through the art of story, many have grown comfortable with occultic themes, especially children—the true target of demonic aggression.

It is not an isolated opinion.

What is witchcraft, exactly?

The original Hebrew term for *witchcraft* is *kashaph*. It means to whisper a spell, to enchant or practice magic; a sorcerer, witch or use witchcraft.[32]

Witchcraft is the art of asserting one's will over another—manipulation. It exercises control to get its way at the expense of others. By use of spells, rituals, and incantations, the witch believes she can impel sprit beings to do her bidding and exert her will. For example, enact revenge on someone she felt wronged her.

Witchcraft is rebellious. It works independently from God. It opposes authority, especially against godly principles and those who practice them. It despises submission and refuses to yield to anyone's will but her own. To walk in such rebellion is to entertain devils.

While broad in scope, witchcraft is often separated into two categories: White and black.

White magic, presumably, is magic used for good. It is also referred to as "good magic," due to its use of herbal and natural elements. Additionally, it is associated with feminine concepts such as goddess worship or oneness with nature. This is typically practiced by what is commonly called a "good witch."

Black magic is its sinister counterpart. Its practitioners understand the evil source of their powers. It is associated with dark rituals, conjurings, sacrifice (animal and human), and devilish imagery. These wield their magic for more nefarious reasons.

But there's a problem with that. Evil shares no color. Witchcraft is neither black nor white. They are two sides of the same coin. And neither can be separated from their original roots. They are demonic, equally. Evil powers cannot be used for good. Nor can they be bound to do the bidding of any one individual or cult. There are no good demons in the spirit realm.

Those who believe in such a thing are under a strong delusion, a lie. Whether good or evil, both stem from one originator—Lucifer.

Witchcraft takes many forms. Numerous occult practices fall under its umbrella. Horoscopes, fortune telling, psychic readings, Tarot cards, astrology, Ouija boards, necromancy, or conjuring the dead are all forms of witchcraft, no matter how "good" they seem. These are many branches rooted in one tree. Such practices open the doors to the spirit realm and expose practitioners to demonic activity. This may occur in the form of hauntings, nightmares, and unexplainable happenings. By engaging in these works, it gives evil spirits "a right" to enter your life. A form of permission unbeknownst to the those who entertain them.

The Spirit of Witchcraft is a deceiving and deadly spirit. Perhaps that's why The Bible, in Deuteronomy 18, strongly warns against it:

> *There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord.*

Witchcraft kills.

Chapter Nine

Pornification Nation

"I have seen a flood of filth and a baptism of dirt In America … our newsstands are going to be flooded with such filth Playboy *magazine will look like a puritanical piece of trash."*

— David Wilkerson, *The Vision*

THE LONG-FULFILLED PREDICTION WAS delivered at a time when about three adult magazines existed. *Playboy* being one of them. It was 1973, before cable TV, and decades before the advent of the internet. Few can argue that the prophetic warning has come to pass. And then some.

Pornography has since infiltrated today's culture on an unimaginable scale. Never mind magazines. There are millions of porn sites on the internet today. It's at our fingertips, a click away. With the tap of a button, virtually any sexual act, no matter how depraved, can be indulged. Now millions are exposed to obscenities that rarely existed decades ago. No one is immune to its destructive influence.

No longer do you have to visit a newsstand or some seedy sex shop, or an X-rated theater on the edge of town to gratify sexual urges. The digital flood has made pornography acceptable, normal. And in its wake, it has rinsed away the shame once associated with buying erotic materials in public.

But pornography is not limited to the digital age. The greatest civilizations in the world were held in its seductive grip.

Pornography is derived from the Greek word *pornea*. It means *the selling off (surrendering) of sexual purity; promiscuity of any type.*

Similarly, *porneuo* is *to act the harlot, indulge in unlawful lust (of either sex), or practice idolatry; to commit fornication.*[33]

Porn is not new. Its lusty tentacles spread across centuries and continents. Ancient cultures have commonly equated *pornea* with ritual prostitution. It was synonymous with cult worship of a local deity, typically a feminine figure, such as Canaan's Asherah, the Queen of Heaven, or Artemis of the Greeks; or her Roman counterpart, Diana. Religious sex with a shrine prostitute—a human representation of the female deity—was believed a form of devotion to the goddess. Oneness with divinity. No wonder many desired its trappings. It was worship at its most carnal. Faith without sacrifice.

Indeed, prostitution was so rampant among Semitic cultures that it polluted the Temple of God in ancient Israel. Booths for whoredom were erected in its outer court. And this practice continued until the religious reforms of Judah's King Josiah. The Old Testament tells that the zealous king:

> *... tore down the ritual booths of the perverted persons that were in the house of the Lord, where the women wove hangings for the wooden image.*[34]

Society today consumes more pornography than any other time in history. While *pornea* was prevalent in ancient times, it was not as pervasive as today. It was limited geographically. Obviously, the technology to seduce minds by the millions didn't exist then. It does now.

But is porn harmless entertainment?

Repeated exposure is thought to dull the reward center of the brain. Over time, it becomes desensitized. And porn that was once euphoric no

longer excites. The habitual user then needs more graphic, or sadistic, material to achieve the same "high." In fact, more abuse-themed videos exist now than ever.

Porn destroys. With continual use, some find it difficult to hold "normal" relationships. Typical sex becomes boring. The sexual acts performed by porn vixens are almost impossible for most women to measure up to.

While pornography is more accepted than ever, it poses dangerous consequences for relationships between men and women and the culture. A 2014 study found that compulsive porn users had greater impairment of sexual arousal and erectile difficulties in intimate relationships, but not with sexually explicit materials.

Dr. Mary Anne Layden, the director of education at the Center for Cognitive Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania, shares this view. She writes in *The Social Costs of Pornography:*

> *I have also seen in my clinical experience that pornography damages the sexual performance of the viewers. Pornography viewers tend to have problems with premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction. Having spent so much time in unnatural sexual experiences with paper, celluloid and cyberspace, they seem to find it difficult to have sex with a real human being. Pornography is raising their expectation and demand for types and amounts of sexual experiences; at the same time it is reducing their ability to experience sex.*[35]

That could explain why, for the first time in history, the seductive allure of pornography has replaced that of a real naked woman. Real sex simply equates to bad porn.

Statistics reveal a disturbing trend—porn watchers are growing younger, with increasingly explicit tastes.

According to *Pornhub*, one of the largest online porn sites, it catered to some 28.5 billion visitors in 2017. That's an average of 81 million visits a day! The site saw 24.7 billion searches in just one year. And transferred enough data to fill the memory of every iPhone in use on the planet.

While ages 25-34 comprise its largest demographic, male viewers 18-24 made up 29% of its entire viewership. Among its top searches include themes of incest, including *Stepmom* and *Mom*. *Teen*, *Hentai,* and *Cartoon* also rank among the top search categories. *Milf* was favored among all age groups.

But porn is not for men only. A surprising number of women indulge in its pleasures, too. In fact, women viewed the *Lesbian* category 197% more than men. *Threesome* and *Gangbang* were other favored searches among women.

Yet, despite these numbers, pornography has grown increasingly abusive toward the female sex. Today, it is more sadistic, degrading, and violent than ever before. Neuroscientist, Dr. Norman Doidge, writes in *The Brain That Changes Itself:*

> *In our post-*Playboy *world, porn now features degradation, abuse, and humiliation of females in a way never before seen in the mass media. […] [S]oftcore is now what hardcore was a few decades ago. […] The*

> *comparatively tame softcore pictures of yesteryear … now show up on mainstream media all day long, in the pornification of everything, including television, rock videos, soap operas, advertisements, and so on.*[36]

America is indeed pornified. There's no end on the horizon. In fact, the industry remains ever on the forefront of technology, pushing its offerings deeper into the future. The latest advancements in virtual and augmented reality technologies promise sexual experiences unlike any other.

But as the industry pushes the envelope of sexual avarice, so, too, will the perversions grow more grotesque. Demoniacal. A hornet's nest of depravity has been kicked, and from it will issue a swarm of unimaginable perversions. Pedophilia, bestiality, and every taboo act will become uncontainable. It's only a matter of time before these desires are glamorized, normalized, and even accepted among the masses.

This is the havoc the Spirit of Pornea wreaks on society.

Chapter Ten

A Feminizing Spirit: Turning Men into Sissies

"What one generation tolerates the next generation will embrace."
— John Wesley

Credit: Instagram

No, that's not a young girl.

WHEN ABC NEWS' *GOOD MORNING America* introduced eleven-year-old, drag kid, Desmond Napoles, the crowd erupted in cheers and applause.

Airing November 2, 2018, co-hosts, Michael Strahan and Sara Haines, lauded as the prepubescent boy strutted and sauntered toward the stage with the sexual swagger of an adult woman.

Desmond (aka Desmond is Amazing) donned a long, blonde wig and makeup. He wore a yellow and white 1960's style minidress and white fur jacket, along with white stockings and sparkly silver heels.

Onstage, the hosts celebrated him as a brave pioneer, as he discussed his love of drag, trains, and caffeine-free root beer.

"*My mom doesn't like me drinking caffeine*," he chirped, when asked about his likes.

Later in the show, three drag queens were invited out to meet him, all of whom offered him gifts. Makeup, tutorials, and dance classes were among those awarded for his "courage" and "inspiration."

While his mantra of "*be yourself always*" may resonate with the LGBTQ+ community, it sets a dangerous precedence for boys and the male identity in today's culture.

At the writing of this book, Desmond has 119,000 followers on Instagram. He hopes to open a drag club for kids.

Six months prior to the show's airing, *The New York Times* ran the following headline:

Boy Scouts Will Drop the 'Boy' in Its Namesake Program, as It Welcomes Girls Next Year

The announcement was met with swift backlash.

Immediately following the decision, the Church of Latter Day Saints announced it would sever its century-long partnership with the American institution. The move accounted for the loss of more than 425,000 members from its ranks, reducing membership by 18%.

The organization also revealed that girls would be allowed to participate in all levels of scouting, alongside boys.

It's certainly not the first of the Boy Scouts controversial decisions. For years, the red tide of femininity has beaten against the bastion of traditional values and has conceded to numerous pressures from LGBTQ+ activists.

The year prior, they had allowed transgender males to join. A ban on gay scouts was lifted in 2014, as well as a ban that restricted homosexual men to serve as Scout Master. The organization has since lifted all membership restrictions, including the one that requires *Boy* Scouts to be boys.

Such decisions rail against Scout Law. Defined in 1914, the tenets state that a Scout is to be:

> *... physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight ... brave, clean, and reverent, that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God. A Scout is pure, and clean-minded, and manly*.

Manly.

It's a dirty word these days. It doesn't take a magnifying glass to see there's an all-out assault against the male figure today. And since the American Psychological Association (APA) declared traditional masculinity to be "harmful," the attack has reached alarming heights.

Masculinity is now deemed "toxic." No longer are men viewed as leaders, protectors, and providers, but as suspicious sexual predators, potential rapists, and a threat to females everywhere. The simple message: *Men bad. Women good.*

There's no end to the men bashing in sight. It appears many sectors of society have taken up the torch, driving the mission of emasculation further into the mainstream.

Corporations perpetuate the attack with skewed office policies and sensitivity trainings—propaganda designed to neuter men in the workplace.

Judicial systems rule toward emasculating men while empowering women.

Educational systems continue to teach children gender-neutral, and homosexual, and transgender themes seemingly unopposed.

Even Christian and religious institutions have cowed to their demands, spinelessly forsaking foundational doctrines for more "progressive" and "tolerant" views. A viewpoint that is unarguably unbiblical.

Curiously, the attack has gone wholly unopposed … for now. Oddly, there are no voices crying out against the female gender, against its character flaws and imperfections. No social activists are trying to reshape or curtail its natural tendencies or opinions. No marches. No protests. No #MeToo movement or social media outcry. None declaring how the female nature should be more like that of boys. Only the male has been forced to bow, to demean its true masculine nature, and not the opposite.

Why?

There's Nothing New Under the Sun

Still, America is not the first culture to face a war on masculinity. Ancient historians and philosophers opined on the threat effeminate males posed to their societies. The general complaint among them centered around the attempted erasure of the masculine stamp given to them by God and nature. A sentiment strongly felt by Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.—40 A.D.), who wrote:

> *It begins with the men who belie their sex and are affected with effemination, who debase the currency of nature and violate it by assuming the passions and the outward form of licentious women.*[37]

> *In fact, the transformation of the male nature to the female is practiced by them as an art and does not raise a blush. These persons are rightly judged worthy of death by those who obey the law, which ordains that the man-woman who debases the sterling coin of nature should perish unavenged, suffered not to live for a day or even an hour, as a disgrace to himself, his house, his native land and the whole human race. And the lover of such may be assured that he is subject to the same penalty*.[38]

The similarity is downright shocking. Like today, these also sought to redefine the male identity.

When St. Paul the Apostle wrote to the early church in Corinth, he stated that no *effeminate* would enter the kingdom of God.[39] To his audience, the term would have undoubtedly conjured images of feminized "call boys," young males with female qualities used for sexual purposes.

In classical Greek, the term effeminate or *malakos* refers to boys and men who play the part of the passive partner in homosexual intercourse. Most scholars strongly agree that Paul specifically references the call boy, suggesting some form of pedophilia.

Nevertheless, though scholars remain divided on his *exact* usage, they broadly agree that it denotes the passive homosexual partner.

A Twisting Serpent

A den of snakes has been disturbed. Few could have seen the pantheon of wicked spirits that would descend upon society once homosexual marriage was made legal. It opened the way for all forms of perversions …

perversions evil powers seek to normalize. The immoral flood has since become a tsunami of sexual deviancies.

Water seeks its lowest level. So does depravity. It sinks deeper and deeper, and deeper still. It's a deep and lightless well without end. A veritable rabbit hole.

Down … down … down we go.

For example, the drug addict needs more and more drugs to reach a high once achieved with less, and the porn or sex addict seeks more hardcore experiences to gratify the insatiable lust. But the promise of pleasure is a lie. No satisfaction exists. Users are left with only emptiness, guilt, and self-loathing. It's a vicious cycle, a downward spiral of ever-deepening darkness.

Behind every social assault lay malefic forces. The same holds true for Feminizing Spirits, or the Spirit of Femininity, demons assigned to twist the masculine nature into something it was never created to be. It is a twisting serpent. It twists and distorts the natural design of mankind, disfiguring it to where it is unrecognizable, corroding the "*sterling coin of nature*" until it is of no natural use. It twists boys into girls. Turns men into sissies.

Of course, like all devilish designs, it is advanced through media saturation. With transgenderism steadily on the march toward social acceptance, the next battle ground lay just on the horizon—pedophilia. A war for the souls of children is well underway.

Perhaps what is most shocking about the Desmond story is that he performed in New York City gay bars at the age of ten, with his parents' permission.

Homosexual men offered him dollars bills for his gender-bending routine, much like a stripper. If history has anything to say, society is treading a dark and dangerous path that puts the most vulnerable at risk.

Watch and see. Pedophilia will undoubtedly gain acceptance, gradually, through the dark powers at work in unsuspecting vessels, who hold sway over media outlets.

It will be aimed at children. Cartoons with animated characters will express adult-child sex as a form of “love.” TV sitcoms and movies will produce stories that gain sympathy toward the sexual predator, while condemning a society who “just doesn’t understand.”

Sympathy is a most powerful weapon in the devil’s arsenal.

Meanwhile, comedians will minimize the deviant act through sketches and stand-up routines. Same as late-night shows. Hollywood stars and influencers will spread it through social media. In a war for ratings, mainstream news will devote coverage to the topic to remain relevant. Likewise, schools will take up the mantle to influence children at their youngest, all in an effort to normalize criminal sexual behavior.

Make no mistake. Children are in the cross hairs of evil, namely young boys.

The work of demons.

Chapter Eleven

Who—or What—is the Devil?

"Choosing not to believe in the devil won't protect you from him."
— Anthony Hopkins, *The Rite*

CLOSE YOUR EYES.

Picture the devil.

What do you see?

Chances are you imagined some great-horned beast. Or a man in red with a goatee and a pitchfork amid the fires of hell.

If so, you're not alone. The arts have seduced society to believe such images. But, when it comes to such portrayals, nothing could be further from the truth.

By distorting the devil's true identity, the creative fields have made his existence almost too comical to believe. The devil is made out to be a mere thing of folklore or fantasy, akin to elves, trolls, or fairies. The Boogey Man. Something not to be believed. Much less feared.

Such perceptions minimize his true malice.

That being the case … who—or what—is the devil, exactly?

To know this, some common myths must first be broken. Because everything you've ever imagined the devil to be … everything you've seen in movies … or art … or books … or dreamed is undoubtedly wrong.

Dead wrong.

The devil is not what you think. The aim of this chapter is to destroy such wide-spread notions, that you might know who and what he really is, his true nature and character. But first, we must understand what he is *not*.

Myth #5

The devil is *not* a prankster. He does not wait in the bushes like some mischievous child out to play tricks on you. He—rather *it*—is more cunning and sinister than that.

Myth #4

The devil is *not* a cartoon character. He does not have horns or parade around in tights and a pointy tail wielding a pitchfork. And, for God's sake, the devil is not red!

Myth #3

The devil is *not* a work of fiction. He is not a figment of men's imaginations, made up by creative minds to explain away the evil doings of mankind.

Myth #2

The devil is *not* a symbol in which to pin society's fears, failures, and ills upon. Something to blame terrible and unfortunate events in which to find meaning.

Myth #1

The biggest myth of all … And let it be loud and clear: The devil is *NOT* in hell. Not yet. Neither is he its king.

But if not these, then what is he?
The devil is an angel.
Or was, at least.

Before he was ever called the devil or Satan, he was Lucifer, heaven's highest-ranking angel. Lucifer was not just any angel, either. He was the most beautiful being God had ever created. Among countless heavenly hosts none were like the angel Lucifer. None more perfect.

He was extravagant in beauty. Shrewd in wisdom. Faultless in servitude.

Lucifer was as brilliant as the sun and stars in appearance. His divine form was made of various glittering jewels and precious stones, radiant in the light of God. Prisms of color danced from his being with every move, dazzling, spectacular, opulent in splendor. Like bands of silver sunlight bursting forth at daybreak.

Lucifer's very name would attest to his magnificence: *Light Bearer* or *Shining One. Son of the Morning.*

Along with Lucifer's exalted beauty, musical instruments were built into his frame. Rapturous melodies and orchestrations issued from his very being. Essentially, he was a living symphony of one. Lucifer did not merely create music … he *was* music.

Due to his matchless talent, he is thought to have been heaven's worship leader. A heavenly maestro. A position that would allow him to lead innumerable angels in the worship of God. In short, Lucifer was heaven's rock star. He was royalty. And angels sang the devil's songs.

If that wasn't enough, he was unequal in wisdom, intellect, power, and authority. Among his angelic companions, none could compare. None were more influential or awe-inspiring. Only God Himself was more magnificent.

Not only was he heaven's most dazzling spectacle … not only God's gift to music, literally … but Lucifer was entrusted with one of the highest roles in all of heaven—the guardian of God's throne.

As a "*covering cherub*," he had direct access into the fiery presence of God, a place other angels dare to tread, nor were allowed. But because he was perfect in his ways, Lucifer had unfettered access to the very throne of God.

It was a role that filled him with pride, envy. It would also become his downfall. Lucifer was mistaken in this one thing …

He was the *creation,* not the *Creator.*

The next biblical passage, Ezekiel 28:13-15, describes Lucifer's actual appearance and importance.

> *'You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: the sardius (ruby), topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, turquois, and the emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes was prepared for you on the day you were created.*
>
> *You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones. You* were *perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.'*

What a different picture this is!

The Fall of Lucifer

How long Lucifer had held his office before sin took root is unknown. What is clear is that pride was found in him. The exalted angel fell in love

with himself, his power, and his influence. Drunk with ego, he thought himself equal to the Most High.

Evidently, heaven's accolades were not enough. He wanted more. And in his vanity, he sought to overthrow the Creator, to seat himself upon the throne and reign in His stead, to be worshipped as God.

To *be* God.

Scripture declares the depth of his arrogance.

> *For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit in the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High …*[40]

With five self-centered declarations, Lucifer declared the aim of his vaulting ambition. The angel then mounted a rebellion against God. Through cunning persuasion and influence, he gathered a third of the angels to his unholy cause.

Lucifer built an army. Sides were chosen. War broke out. Angel clashed against angel. Light versus dark. Good against evil.

Paradise darkened.

But war proved as vain as his spirit. Lucifer, along with his angels, was defeated and ultimately cast out of heaven. The price of Lucifer's rebellion? The Book of Revelation details the climactic end of his mistaken plight.

> *Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any*

> *longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*[41]

After his expulsion, no longer was he called Lucifer, but Satan. However, this was not a new name given to him, but a new *title*, one that reflects his true character. No longer would he bear the name *Light Bearer* or *Shining One,* but *Accuser* or *Adversary. Deceiver.* A name that reflects his hostility toward all that is good or godly.

In his wroth, the devil declared war against God, and man. Due to his great wickedness, he is also known by variety of notorious names—Wicked One, Serpent, The Beast, The Dragon, Father of Lies, Antichrist, Abaddon, Angel of Death.

No one can say how long Lucifer enjoyed his heavenly privileges, but one thing is clear … pride and vanity entered his being. It was his undoing.

Where is the Devil Now?

As previously mentioned, the devil is not in hell. Contrary to popular belief, he doesn't reign in the fiery pits, torturing damnable souls for all eternity. Nor will he ever.

Hell was created by God for Satan and his demons, and all who forsake Him. It is a place of excruciating torment, made specially for rebellious spirits—human or otherwise. A prison sentence for those who transgress God's holy laws. Ultimately, the Evil One will be consigned to this pit. But that time has yet to come, not yet.

Make no mistake, there will be no crown for Satan in hell. All that awaits him is pain, terror, and gloom. He will suffer wrath along with the

rest. Maybe more. But that sentence is reserved for another time—Judgment Day … when he will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

So, if Satan is not in hell, where exactly is he? For his rebellion, he was cast from heaven to Earth, along with his followers. In other words, Satan reigns *here*. Now.

The apocalyptic Book of Revelation 12:12 affirms this, stating:

> *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.*

Importantly, the fallen angel's powers have not diminished. They were not stripped at his fall. Not at all. He still possesses all the supernatural powers he was first created with. Only what was once used to exalt and honor the Creator, he now uses for evil, deceit, and destruction against humanity. The devil lost his home, not his powers. Same for his minions.

Along with his untarnished abilities, Satan still wields unrelenting authority. In fact, heaven's angels still regard his influence and refuse to speak evil against him. Not only does The Bible state he was cast to the earth, but that he is also "*the prince of the power of the air*"[42] and "*god of this age*."[43] All in all, Satan wields supernatural power and authority upon the Earth; and his diabolical work advances through individuals under his influence, those governed by his principles, knowingly or not. The children of wrath.

Whether you believe in his existence makes no difference. Until Judgment Day, Satan and his demon cohorts plague the world, the living. Still, the question remains …

Why?

Chapter Twelve

The Big Why

"Envy aims very high."
— Ovid

NOW THAT WE HAVE UNMASKED the devil, and you know who he really is, it's time to learn *why* he does the hateful things he does.

In 2009, Canadian Cardiologist, Guy Turcotte, murdered his two children in Prevost, Quebec. He stabbed his five-year-old son, Oliver, twenty-seven times, and his daughter nineteen times, while they slept. Anna-Sophia was three.

About seven cuts were found on young Oliver's hands from when he awoke to defend himself; his hands used as a shield. The girl had suffered wounds to the stomach, lorax, and back. The pair were killed upon returning home from a visit to their mother in America.

The gruesome tale illustrates Satan's malice toward humanity. In it, the deep reasonings for his wrath are revealed. Reasons for his evil doings. These can be summed up in one word …

Envy.

When Lucifer was driven from heaven, he lost more than his heavenly home. He lost God's love and affection, lost His favor and kindness, lost direct access to the throne. Lost his position and celebrity status. Lost it all.

Ever since, the devil can't bear to see the lesser creation receive God's adoration. To see man as the apple of His eye. Now, the affections of the Lord no longer belong to him, but to man. For Satan, it's a bitter pill for another to taste the things of paradise. Things he once had, and lost.

Ultimately, Satan's disdain for mankind stems from losing his own relationship with the Almighty. He lost His care and became an enemy. Redemption no longer exists for the exiled angel, only delayed judgment.

For that, out of broiling envy, he seeks to destroy the objects of God's love, to mar His creation, to rob them of their hope of paradise, salvation. All for revenge. To get back at God, he enacts vengeance on His cherished creation—mankind. *You.* All to hurt the heart of God, for spite. It's a cosmic case of "If I can't have Him, no one can."

The love of God toward people enrages Lucifer. And the mere fact that you exist makes you a target of his great wrath. He has no greater joy than your destruction.

In fact, he would rather that you had never been born at all.

Satan, The Bible says, was a murderer from the beginning. And in a spiritual sense, abortion—murder of the unborn—exists because it removes any potential threat to his kingdom.

Through infanticide, all chances of an individual experiencing what he had lost die in the womb, literally. It is designed to strike at the heart of the Heavenly Father.

In the above story, it was reported that cardiologist, Guy Turcotte, confessed his crimes to hospital nurse Chantel Duhamel. In a chilling 2015 court testimonial, she told, "He said he wanted to make her angry, and that the way to do so was to take away from her what was most precious to her. 'I would like you to tell her that I did it to piss her off,' " Duhamal said of Turcotte. The headline that splashed across media outlets read: *Father Kills His Children to Spite Ex-wife.* By the same token, the devil wages war against humanity, against God. For spite.

Born of envy.

Chapter Thirteen

The Dirty Work of Devils
(How demons operate)

"Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap."
— AC/DC

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND *why* the devil performs such exploits. We must move on to *how* he advances his evil causes.

Satan and his forces do not work alone. He uses *people* to advance his plots. Surprisingly, these plans could even appear as "good." But they are indeed deceptive. Through his cunning, he incites individuals to do his bidding—killing. He finds messengers to speak and do destructive things, conjure evil schemes, and carry out his nefarious initiatives.

On a personal level, unwitting people are used to whisper subtle but evil thoughts into unsuspecting minds … thoughts of doubt, fear, condemnation, and many other hurtful things to bring about personal ruin.

On a societal level, the Evil One uses powerful individuals to subvert social norms and replace them with base ideologies. To make evil good; good evil.

Governments, religions, educational systems, media, entertainment, and corporations are all weapons in Satan's hand. Unwitting pawns and puppets used to pass laws, seduce minds, and oversaturate society with repetitive and destructive messages until perverted ideals are accepted as "normal." Plans hatched by hell itself. Hence, people and demons work in tandem to carry out Satan's schemes.

Demons are strategic. To advance their wicked plots, dark forces employ long-term strategies. These target bedrock beliefs and values, and

interject ideals that are harmful to society, destructive things.

Evil things.

To succeed, the moral foundation of society must be chipped away. This is done slowly, at first. It can take place over years, or even decades. Otherwise, it would be easily recognized as evil and rejected outright.

Dark forces wage war on numerous fronts at once. Powerful mediums and institutions are at their disposal, to assault all that is good or godly. And when it comes to attacking social views and swaying mass opinion toward a corrupt cause, no greater weapons exist than these: Comedy, media, and politics.

To understand this process, let's take a look at the widespread acceptance of homosexuality; how it went from a once-despised sexual act, and mental disorder, to a somewhat cultural norm in mainstream America. (Stay with me as I illustrate my point.)

Historically speaking, the behavior was deemed "morally depraved" among society. The long-held views of successive generations were helped shaped by biblical passages such as Leviticus 18:22: *"You will not lie with a man as with a woman. It is an abomination …"*

And Leviticus 20:13:

> *If a man lies with a man as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them.*

Abomination. Old Testament law leaves no room for interpretation. In both instances, the message is clear, direct. Black and white. Its strong denouncement is inarguable. Clearly, homosexuality is forbidden. So, how did such an abhorred act become normalized in America?

It was no accident.

An orchestrated assault against social norms was unleashed. A decades-long attack against foundational beliefs, values, and institutions was instituted. Widespread acceptance was not achieved over night. It came little by little. Piece by piece. It was wrought slowly, over time, over decades.

Let's look at the various methods employed.

COMEDY

One way society is made to accept evil is through humor—laughter.

No joke. Humor is a weapon. It's often used to bludgeon the views and credibility of others. Whether making fun of someone's looks, values, or beliefs, humor helps to suppress behavior that doesn't line up with group norms. Laughter shames.

Humor neutralizes. It takes the edge off an otherwise touchy or controversial subject. Dulls the blade, so to speak. Humor makes harmful views easier to swallow while minimizing the threat of a thing. It sweetens the poison. In essence, comedy is an antivenom used to weaken its toxicity. Makes it seem less … evil.

Likewise, humor is used to conform others into desired behaviors. By painting one in a negative light, it makes them seem out of touch with supposed progressive views. It helps challenge social norms and replace them with more "progressive" ideals.

It strengthens one's views while it weakens and excludes another's. Simply put, it makes one look good, another bad.

In humor studies, this is known as *Superiority Theory*. The theory states that people laugh at others' misfortunes and shortcomings because it

gives them a sense of superiority over them. Comedy allows listeners to feel that superiority, along with the joke-teller.

It's nothing new. The Superiority Theory traces back to ancient history. Greek philosopher Plato believed laughter originated in malice; Aristotle asserted that we laugh at inferior or ugly individuals because we sense a joy at feeling superior to them. Seventeenth century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), arguably the most prolific theorist on the origins of laughter and the Superiority Theory, writes in his 1651 book, Leviathan*:*

> *... the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves ...*[44]

Even ancient biblical writings mention the malicious nature of laughter. Compared to the twenty-nine times laughter is mentioned in The Bible, only two are born of joy and a "merry heart." The rest? Scorn, mockery, derision, and contempt.

All jokes contain a winner and a loser, no matter how seemingly innocent.

Today, a great deal of viciousness is masked as comedy. Nowhere is this more evident than in the world of entertainment. Late-night talk show hosts, stand-up comedians, sketch comedy shows, and the like deliver vitriolic monologues and skits against individuals and groups, in order to marginalize them and sway popular opinion toward their own viewpoints.

Funny. Through humor, the vilest insults and character assassinations can be made without consequence, all in the name of comedy. But, when it comes to swaying public perception on a grand scale, the TV sitcom has no equal.

In the case of homosexuality, the situational comedy was used to expose millions of American households to the behavior for the first time. The TV sitcom was instrumental in laying the foundation for the acceptance to follow decades later. The first laid brick, so to say.

How so?

It first happened through the 1970's hit TV series *All in the Family.* In its first season, the show explored gay themes with its fifth episode, "Judging Books by Covers." It introduced American audiences to the first-ever gay TV character to appear on a major network.

Airing February 9, 1971, the episode questioned who is gay and who is not.

The script squares main character Archie Bunker, a brash, working-class New Yorker, against his progressive son-in-law, Mike, and wife, Gloria. Archie believes that Mike's flamboyant friend, Roger, is gay.

When Archie learns that he's been invited over for lunch, he voices his contempt before retreating to the local bar to hang out with his pals, notably Steve, a former NFL linebacker. The scripted dialogue reveals Archie's disapproval.

> Archie: *Who's the big cheese you're havin' here for lunch?*
>
> Gloria: *Roger.*
>
> Archie: *Roger, the fairy?*
>
> Mike: *All right, all right. Let's not start.*
>
> Archie: *Did you hear that, Edith? You know who they're bringin' around here for lunch? Roger. Sweetie Pie Roger!*
>
> Mike: *Would you cut it out, huh?*

Edith: *He's their friend, Archie.*

Archie: *Listen, Edith. We run a decent home here, and we don't need any strange little birdies flyin' in and out of it.*

Gloria: *Daddy, you stop that. Roger's not a strange little birdie.*

Archie: *His pal Roger is as queer as a four-dollar bill, and he knows it.*

Gloria: *That's not only cruel, Daddy, that's an outright lie!*

Mike: *You know something, Archie, just because a guy is sensitive, and he's an intellectual, and he wears glasses, you make him out a queer.*

Archie: *I never said a guy who wears glasses is a queer. A guy who wears glasses is* a four eyes. *A guy who is a fag is a* queer.

Gloria: *Mom, make him stop talking like that.*

Edith: *Oh, dear, I-I-I don't know.*

Gloria: *Mom—*

Archie: *Go ahead, Edith. Now, answer the girl. Now, you've seen Roger sashaying around here with his* la-di-da *talk. He's a pansy.*

Edith: *I don't know.*

Archie: *Whadd'ya mean, you don't know?*

Edith: *I'm not an expert on flowers.*

Mike: *Archie, look. You might as well face it. You're all alone in this. We all know Roger, and we all know he's straight. And even if he wasn't—and I said* if—*what*

difference would that make? In many countries—England for instance—there is a law that says whatever two consenting adults do in private is their own business.

Archie: *Listen. THIS AIN'T ENGLAND. We threw England outta here a long time ago. We don't want no more part of England. And for your information, England is a* fag *country.*

Mike: *What?*

Archie: *Certainly. Ain't they still pickin' handkerchiefs out of their sleeves, heh? Ain't they still standin' around, leanin' on them skinny umbrellas like this here? I know this: Their whole society is based on a kind of a fagdom.*

Mike: *Di—you ... you ... you know, you're right, Archie. You're right. The British are a bunch of pansies. Pansies, fairies, and sissies. And the Japanese are a race of midgets; the Irish are boozers; the Mexicans are bandits—*

Archie: *And you Pollocks are meatheads.*

[Doorbell rings. Enter Roger.]

Roger is a wiry man with wispy, sand-colored hair and thick, black-rimmed glasses. He wears a belted grey leisure suit jacket over a purple shirt. A burgundy paisley neckerchief is tied around his neck. Much too feminine for Archie's taste.

When Roger shares photos from his trip to England, it only fuels Archie's annoyance.

Irritated with the willy-nilly guest, Archie heads to the local bar, where he soon learns that his macho, former NFL friend, Steve, is gay. Archie is shocked beyond belief.

Later, Archie asks Steve about his sexuality over an arm-wrestling match. Steve affirms it's true then pins Archie's arm down in defeat. While subtle, the episode was a shrewdly disguised piece of propaganda used to sway public perception in favor of homosexuality. It was a brilliant yet calculated use of comedy.

What really happened?

You would have missed it if you blinked. That's how subtle it was. But once exposed, the message becomes very clear. A closer look reveals that Archie is made to appear an antiquated bigot to Mike's "evolved" views. Archie is dumb, dated. Mike is smart and progressive.

When Steve pins Archie's arm, it symbolizes a subliminal triumph over Archie's dated principles. Principles Archie holds dear. His views, in essence, are in need of defeat. At the same time, it takes aim at all who share his opinion, denigrating the values of millions of Americans at once.

See it now?

Archie, along with all who think like him, are made to appear weak and out of touch. Steve, who represents the homosexual ideology, is strong, attractive, and open-minded. The message: Homosexuality wins; mainstream values lose.

The live audience, and millions of viewers, was shocked by the episode. Its impact was even felt in the White House. Even former President Richard Nixon found it disturbing.

Evidently, the propaganda techniques employed by CBS did not escape the attention of he and his staff. While Nixon mistakenly thought it was a

movie, he was outraged and concerned. He felt the show glorified homosexuality.

The following audio transcript details the conversation between Nixon, Domestic Affairs Advisor John Ehrlichman, and Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman about the shocking episode:

> Nixon: *CBS came on with a movie. They had two magnificent handsome guys, and a stupid old fellow in it. They were glorifying homosexuality!*
>
> Ehrlichman: *Was that a panel, sir?*
>
> Nixon: *Hell no, it was a movie!*
>
> Haldeman: *No, that's a regular show; it's on every week. And usually, it's just set in the guy's home. It's usually just that guy, who's a hardhat.*
>
> Nixon: *That's right, he's a hard hat.*
>
> Ehrlichman: *And he always just looks like a slob.*
>
> Nixon: *Looks like Jackie Gleason.*
>
> Haldeman: *And then he has this hippie son-in-law. And, uh, usually the general trend of it is to downgrade him, and upgrade—*
>
> Nixon: *Upgrade the hippie son-in-law.*
>
> Haldeman: *Make the square hardhat to be bad.*
>
> Ehrlichman: *What's it called? I've never seen it.*
>
> Nixon: *Archie is the guy's name.*
>
> Ehrlichman: *Now that's real family entertainment, isn't it?*
>
> Nixon: *The point that I make is that, goddammit, I do not think that you glorify, on public television,*

> *homosexuality! You ever see what happened? You know what happened to the Greeks? Homosexuality destroyed them. Aristotle was a homo; we all know that. So was Socrates.*
>
> Ehrlichman: *But he never had the influence that television has.*
>
> Nixon: *The last six Roman emperors were fags. You see, homosexuality, immorality in general, these are the enemies of strong societies. That's why the communists and the left-wingers are pushing it. They're trying to destroy us.*[45]

Soon after its airing, other major networks followed suit, introducing gay characters of their own. Most likely to stay relevant among audiences. That and for ratings. *All in the Family* had paved the way for sitcoms like *Soap, Will and Grace,* and *Modern Family.* Cable networks would later push the envelope with Showtime's series' *The L Word* and *Queer as Folk.*

Today, you would be hard-pressed to find a sitcom without some expression of homosexuality. Doubtless, the once abhorrent behavior has become popularized, even cheered, in today's culture. Whether this would have happened without the cantankerous Archie Bunker is hard to tell.

But mass acceptance of homosexuality is only the beginning. Through humor, supernatural forces will attempt to normalize the most abominable perversions: pedophilia, incest, bestiality, Satanic ritualistic sex, and even sacrifice. Those who practice such things will challenge the beliefs of millions to decriminalize their lustful impulses. And it will be done, in part, through comedy, through agents of darkness.

Demons love to laugh … at your expense.

MEDIA

Media plays a critical role in driving wicked ideologies.

Hitler was demonic.

He was also a brilliant propagandist. How else could he influence an entire society to commit the most horrific atrocities in human history?

> *"The most brilliant propaganda technique will yield no success unless one fundamental principle is borne in mind constantly - it must confine itself to a few points and repeat them over and over."*
>
> — Adolf Hitler[46]

He understood the power of media. He knew it could shift thought, sway emotions, and marginalize one people, group, over another. Demonize them. Through a propagandized media, his diabolical program of death and Arian rule had nearly succeeded.

Still, evil as Hitler was, he understood that a simple, repetitive message could sway masses into accepting his twisted agenda … and used it for mass genocide.

News can be a weapon of malice.

In *The Technological Society,* French philosopher, professor, and sociologist, Jacque Ellul, illumines the role media plays in shaping individual opinions and beliefs on a grand scale.

> *"It is the emergence of mass media which makes possible the use of propaganda techniques on a societal scale. The orchestration of press, radio and television*

> *to create a continuous, lasting and total environment renders the influence of propaganda virtually unnoticed, precisely because it creates a constant environment."*[47]

Ellul viewed propaganda as "*psychological manipulation."*

Dark tendrils choke the masses through media. Today's news media, with its twenty-four-hour news cycle, can sway minds and incite action like never before. The vast number of media outlets is staggering. *CNN, FOX*, and *MSNBC* inform cable viewers; the likes of *Politico* and *Huffington Post* dominate online news. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* remain relevant print publications. Add radio, podcasts, and a slew of news commentators and contributors, and you get a ceaseless bombardment of information overload.

What's more? Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook have made news into digestible sound bites, easily shared with millions in a single click. Delivered at lightning speed.

Control the message, and you can control the minds.

Media today is utilized to mold views and opinions on a societal scale. It's a relentless hammer used to pound messages into the minds of the masses. Tools to deceive, manipulate, and create division between those with opposing views.

Devil's tools.

Most news today is little more than veiled propaganda. Mind control.

Even so, the power of propaganda is irresistible among news outlets. Some push false narratives, lies, half-truths, and agendas to get the mainstream to accept base ideologies. Ideas birthed in hell.

Masquerading as fair and balanced news, many offer a one-sided slant on various issues. To reinforce their views, they air a non-stop gaggle of *pundits* and talking heads that align with their agendas, to sway popular opinion. Never before has news been more ugly, venomous.

But how do you tell the difference between propaganda and real news? Easy. Here are some of the most widely used methods:

Agenda Setting: The ability to influence the importance of one topic over the next. If a news item is covered more frequently, the audience will regard it as more important.

Classical Conditioning: The concept of repetitive messaging. Essentially, it is "staying on message." Same as Hitler did.

Dysphemism: This method is when someone uses derogatory or insulting terms in place of neutral or pleasant ones. It's used to discredit, diminish, and hurt a person's personal beliefs or opinions through labeling. For instance, the term *shrink* may replace *psychiatrist*, or *do-gooder* rather than *charity worker. Extremist* in place of someone with strong views. And so on.

Name calling: Exactly as it sounds. Name calling incites fear and arouses prejudices. It's designed to construct a negative opinion about a group or its values or ideas. Smears credibility. Some commonly used in

> today's media are *sexist, bigot, homophobic,* and the mother of all smeary insults—*racist.*

Sound familiar? It should. These are used every single day, on nearly every network. So much so that the lines between rhetoric and real news have been dangerously blurred. Now that we know these cunningly deceptive techniques, let's return to our discussion: how homosexuality gained mass acceptance.

At about the same time homosexuality first laughed its way into American households, broadcast news provided coverage of the latest in gay activism and advancements every step of the way.

However, the social acceptance of today was unimaginable in the early 1970s. In fact, homosexuality was loathed by civil society. It was thought perverse, immoral, unnatural.

Sin.

Sin practiced by a perverse subculture on the fringes of society, hidden in the shadows. Where it belonged, most felt. It was not flaunted in plain sight like today.

The era's media landscape was vastly different at the time. Only three major networks existed—CBS, ABC, and NBC. This made the choice for news limited by today's standards.

For the latest reports, either you would catch the nightly five o'clock news, listen to the radio, or fetch the morning newspaper from your driveway each day. That or wait for a monthly magazine like *Time* or *Life* to run an exclusive spread. twenty-four-hour cable news had yet to exist. Internet was decades away.

Homosexuality was then a taboo topic. Public exposure to gay issues was rare. Rare and sensational. Despite public disdain, the media was often

quick to report on gay issues. Coverage often sparked outcry, boycotts, and public debate. Threats. But this only worked to the media's advantage.

Such backlashes meant a ratings bonanza for the networks. At the same time, it fostered publicity and fueled momentum for gay activism. Political wins, riots, pride parades, court battles, and victories all garnished airtime and column inches.

Every publicized story grew awareness while shaping public opinion toward homosexuality.

This continued through the following decades. And as the number of media outlets grew, so did the amount of coverage. Seemingly endless reports on court battles, both victories and defeats, created ever-growing publicity and awareness for the cause, for the *abomination*.

The excessive media exposure helped to ease moral views. Or silence them. The stigma once associated with homosexuality has waned. The scarlet letter has since been removed.

Today, for the most part, homosexuality has been normalized. It's considered perfectly acceptable, by most, marking a radical shift in the cultural mindset from preceding decades. And the media played an integral role in shaping that mindset.

Today's media is a propaganda machine. A dangerous and demonic weapon. It delivers a relentless twenty-four seven assault against traditional views and values and withstands any opposing arguments. Those with different views are often labeled as *bigots* or *homophobic*, deserving of swift and severe backlash. Silenced.

A propagandized media is a potentially deadly one. If history teaches us anything it's this: that media, in the wrong hands, can advance unspeakable evils.

Imagine the carnage Hitler could've accomplished with today's media. A shuttering thought.

Demons are news junkies.

The media is theirs to mold your mind.

POLITICS

Satanic ideologies are spread through politics.

Demons are political. When it comes to advancing nefarious plots, politics are a potent weapon in hell's war chest. Alongside the comedic and media assaults, war is also waged on political frontlines.

Scripture mentions that such battles are not fought in the physical realm alone, against mere flesh and blood, but "*against spiritual wickedness is high places ... against principalities, against powers, against rulers of the darkness of this age.*"[48] In simple terms, the fight is not with individuals alone, but with the spirit forces which animate and drive their heinous ideas and actions. The ones behind the curtain.

Essentially, that means evil powers operate through figures of authority. They rule through government officials and positions of power. These are especially prone to demonic influence. A certain target of darkness. Presidents, politicians, senators, lawmakers, congressmen, and judiciaries can become unwitting pawns in the hands of evil.

Continuing with our example, let's trace how politics helped homosexuality gain mass acceptance. About the same time *All in the Family* aired, war was being waged through the U.S. political system. And like comedy, the political landscape of the era became the devil's battleground, literally, figuratively, and spiritually.

Every military needs a headquarters, a base of operations to plan and execute war strategies. Satan, the commander of evil forces, is no different.

Historically, one such base was, and still is, San Francisco. The California city remains as influential now in the cause of gay rights as it did then. Due to its activism and large gay population, it's known today as a kind of gay Mecca in the U.S.

The gay movement first gained traction when Miami's 1972 National Democratic Convention featured, for the first time, a public speech about gay rights. It was delivered by San Francisco's openly gay political activist, Jim Foster.

The following year, the American Psychiatric Association voted 13–0 to remove homosexuality from its official list of psychiatric disorders. The resolution also urged to repeal the laws discriminating against homosexuals. The monumental event further fueled the gay rights movement.

Due to the aggressive lobbying efforts of San Francisco's State Assemblyman Willie Brown, California passed the 1975 *Consenting Adults Sex Bill*. The landmark legislation legalized homosexuality statewide.

The political win thrust the agenda into overdrive. In 1978, the city elected its first openly gay city supervisor, Harvey Milk. That same year, Article 33 was added to the San Francisco Police Code, which prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, and public accommodations in the private sector.

However, Milk's office was short-lived. He was assassinated the following year, along with Mayor George Moscone. Both were gunned down by the embittered former supervisor, Dan White.

Political battles spurred on throughout the 80s and 90s. By then, the political push for homosexuality was no longer limited to San Francisco. It had spread nationwide.

The new century witnessed landmark change.

2004 was a decidedly marked year for gay rights. In a challenge to California law, San Francisco had begun to marry same-sex couples. Seattle, Washington approved same-sex marriage. Portland, Oregon also issued marriage licenses, joining the rapidly spreading crusade that had moved from San Francisco to Upstate, New York. Meanwhile, Massachusetts saw the nation's first gay marriage authorized by law.

The movement gathered such notoriety that, in 2005, even Pope John Paul II had questioned whether there was something sinister behind the aggressive push toward legalization. He writes in his 2005 *Memory and Identity:*

> *It is legitimate and necessary to ask oneself if this is not perhaps part of a new ideology of evil, perhaps more insidious and hidden, which attempts to pit human rights against the family and against man.*[49]

Still, one of the most significant victories came when the Supreme Court overturned President Bill Clinton's Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). In 2013, the Court ruled Section 3 of DOMA as unconstitutional, declaring it, "*a deprivation of the liberty of the person protected by the Fifth Amendment*."

But it was President Barack Obama who had flung wide the doors of homosexuality in America. No acting president was more supportive toward the LGBTQ+ movement. Under his presidency, thirty-five states had legalized gay marriage. When the Supreme Court had later ruled in favor of same-sex marriage, it had become the law of the land, making it legal in all fifty states.

At last, the once-abominable sex act had gained certain victory and mass acceptance. To celebrate, Obama had the White House lit with rainbow colors. On June 26, 2015, he took to Twitter to hail the ruling as a grand achievement.

> *Today is a big step in our march toward equality. Gay and lesbian couples now have the right to marry, just like anyone else. #LoveWins*

Later that night, the White House tweeted:

The former president further gloated at a press conference three days later:

> *I didn't have the chance to comment how good the White House looked in rainbow colors … to see people gathered in the evening on a beautiful summer night and*

to feel whole, and to feel accepted, and to feel they had a right to love, that was pretty cool. That was a good thing.

On his last night in office, the eve of President Donald Trump's inauguration, Obama again took to Twitter, to tout what he believed was one of the greatest achievements of his presidency. And he once again posted the image of the rainbow-colored White House.

But, was it truly a great victory for America? Was it really *a good thing*?

Or was this the proverbial middle finger in the face of God?

No matter the political party … demons fly on the wings of politics.

Chapter Fourteen

Story Time

"You're never too old, too wacky, too wild, to pick up a book and read to a child."

— Dr. Seuss

Devil-inspired transvestite, Annie Christ, reads to kids during story time.
Source: CBS Los Angeles

DEMONS LOVE CHILDREN.

Especially boys.

The younger, the better.

Another method that bears mentioning is perhaps the devil's most deceptive weapon—children's books. Through this seemingly innocuous medium. a battle rages for the minds of children. While they may appear

innocent enough, such books are anything but. Don't let the playful pictures fool you. There is nothing childish about them. Beneath the colorful illustrations and whimsical characters lie blatant themes of homosexuality and transgenderism. This is done in a most serpentine fashion. A wolf in toddlers' clothing.

Aimed at toddlers and children, the adult sexual themes in today's children literature attempt to distort natural and biological truths and create confusion about gender identity, to twist and destroy developing minds. Though seemingly harmless, the messages are clear—boys can be girls; girls boys, and same-sex relationships form a love worthy of celebration. Even magical!

Children's LGBTQ+ literature is little more than a viper in a candy wrapper. Evil cloaked in innocence. And it is out to poison the minds of children at an even earlier age. As a matter of fact, a poll has shown that homosexual and transgender awareness had waned among children. To combat the slump, GLAAD had recommended The Conscious Kid's best reads for ages 0-8.

You read that right. Age *ZERO!*

For toddlers, ages 0-5, *Daddy, Papa, and Me* is a top recommendation. It shares the bond between same-sex parents and their children. *And Tango Makes Three* targets ages 2-5 with the story of two penguins at the Central Park Zoo—Roy and Silo. The two are a little different than the other penguins but desire a family. With the help of a zookeeper, they get the chance to raise a baby penguin of their own. For children 4 through 8, there is *Sparkle Boy*, which explores the gender identity of a boy who likes glittery things. A real page turner.

Topping Amazon's LGBTQ+ children's best seller list is *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo.* The picture book entails a boy bunny who falls in

love with another boy bunny. It explores the message of "tolerance" and "advocacy." Geared toward children 3-8, the book was featured on HBO's *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*. Oliver promoted it on the day of its release, and it became a bestseller and the number one book and e-book on Amazon the next day.

But among the first pieces of LGBTQ+ children's literature to garner broad attention was 1989's *Heather Has Two Mommies*. A story about a girl who is raised by lesbian women. In the 1990s, it was ranked the 9th most frequently challenged book in the United States by the American Library Association.

Clearly, an all-out assault has been waged against society's youngest and most defenseless minds.

Still, storybooks are not the only medium to target young minds. Much the same can be said for kid's shows and cartoons. With an obvious uptick in queer characters in kids' programming, gay-friendly cartoons are on the rise. Alarmingly so. And some of the biggest networks have joined the mix.

Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe* just may be the queerest kid show on TV. In 2018, the show aired a same-sex marriage proposal between characters, Ruby and Sapphire. It again raised the bar with the wedding some days later.

Aimed at an even younger audience, Amazon's *Danger and Eggs* is stuffed with all sorts of queer characters. Created by a transgender animator, the show's characters are voiced by gay and trans actors.

But perhaps the most surprising name among them is Disney. The family-friendly brand continues to push the envelope of LGBTQ+ programming with *Star vs. the Forces of Evil*, the animated series of a boy who transforms into an adventure-seeking princess. The show also aired the first same-sex kiss.

Disney has also made numerous slight but evident nods to homosexuality in its animated films. While the studio has yet to openly define any of its characters as gay, viewers have picked up on its slyly placed LGBTQ+ themes and character traits. Obvious examples include *Frozen's* tormented ice queen, Elsa; Le Fou from *Beauty and the Beast;* and the flamboyant Ken in *Toy Story 3*.

While not an exhaustive list, it is just the tip of the iceberg. In barely any time, kids' programming will become overrun with perversity, exposing children to all manners of sexual deviancies.

Be warned. This is only a taste of things to come. A veritable Pandora's box. First comes a tiny crack in the door; next, the door is nudged open; then kicked wide, torn from its hinges, and its wall demolished. That is the true nature of evil. Do not expect it to stop at any given point. To think that would be truly naïve.

In the world of darkness, there is "never enough." Only more. Only deeper. Darker. This is the order in which dark spirits operate, to deceive unwitting minds into embracing wickedness in all its grotesque forms.

Today, the spirit of homosexuality has passed through the industry like some runaway ghost, seemingly unopposed. It has seduced individuals in practically every facet of creative production. Execs, directors, animators, programmers, and such have been lulled by its devilish charms. These continue to push the boundaries and redefine what's acceptable in kids' programming.

But the truth is this: deceived people never know they're deceived. That's how deception works. The same holds true for these show creators. While they believe they are in support of something good—equality, love, diversity, tolerance, and acceptance—they have inadvertently become complicit in the works of evil forces. Whether unknowingly or not, they

have engaged in spiritual high crimes against humanity, against children, teens, and even toddlers and infants.

To embrace such ideals is to embrace the principles of Satan.

Demons delight in innocence … but only to destroy it.

Section Three

Dreams, Visions & Warnings

What's the difference between dreams and visions? One is a drift of the imagination. The other of supernatural origin—signs, omens. Delve into these fantastical dreamscapes and their strange tellings.

Chapter Fifteen

Angels Heard on High

"Their rising all at once was as the sound of thunder heard remote."
— John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

DARK. LIGHT. ONE CANNOT EXIST without the other. They are coexistent. Twin flames. Up to this point, much has been said about demons and evil. But it would be remiss to discuss the things of darkness without mentioning those of light. Just as there are demons among us, so, too, there are angels, forces of good in the spirit realm.

The tire shop below my apartment had yet to open. The sound of the air drill, with its shrill *zing-zing* noise, had not yet pierced daybreak; the shrieking sound a daily wakeup call. It was like clockwork. Annoying clockwork. But, before then, all that could be heard was the soothing hum of tires rolling down Brooklyn's 4th Avenue, along with the curt *chirp-chirp-chirp* of police sirens as New York's finest evaded the 23rd Street traffic light.

Even from three stories below, the faint rumbling of the subway could be felt beneath the mattress as it tunneled through the nearby station. It routinely rattled the lacquered hardwoods, fixtures, and pictures along the apartment's mustard walls. A lime-green antique sofa dominated the living room, ornate and gilded gold. Off in the distance, if you looked just right, you could spot Lady Liberty from the window, torch held high against the city skyline.

Somewhere between sleeping and waking, the dream came. If it was fair to even call it a dream. Unlike most dreams that you can *see*, this

registered solely in my hearing. An audible vision, I guess you might say. Only with my ears did I glimpse the strange, unearthly happenings.

Far behind walls of sleep, music could be heard in the distance, a chorus. It emerged from the deepest recesses of my subconscious mind, it seemed. Like the depths of some underwater cave. It was remote, at first. Half-asleep, I first thought it was the Times Square Church choir, the music I routinely heard while going to church in the big city. But that thought was wrong.

The music grew gradually louder, then clearer, then louder still. With my hearing now focused, it became clear that it was no earthly choir. The voices were perfect. *Too perfect*. There was not a flaw to be heard. Not a crack or imperfection in the notes. It sounded as if the melodies were channeled through diamond pipes rather than vocal chords, smooth as liquid silver, without strain or rasp. It was flawless in its sacred perfection, pure, majestic. Holy. Suddenly, it became clear that the voices were not of this world, not at all, but divine. This was the song of angels.

Countless millions joined in a chorus of rapturous joy, singing in an intricately woven cadence too holy for sinful ears. So wonderful it was almost frightening, criminal.

HALLELUJAH ... HALLELUJAH ... HALLELUJAH ...

The voices rang with golden splendor. They were giving adoration to God Almighty, a pure, transcendent worship to Him who sits on the throne. Then came the highs, which climbed higher, brighter, sweeter than any note ever sung. It seemed as one voice, or was it a trillion? The note chimed through the harmonized layers with a glorious, glassy tone, like the ringing sound created when you rub a moistened finger round the rim of a wine glass. It hung there for some time, radiant, splendid, suspended above the

celestial composition before it abated, rose again, and then weaved its way through the blankets of silken sound … until another noise was heard.

It was detected deep in the background; a crackling, rumbling sound like that of a gathering storm, low at first. A steady rumbling followed. Violent peals of thunder cracked and boomed as it grew steadily louder, closer. Peals of doom, blasting. You could almost feel the darkness closing in.

It grew steadily in volume and intensity. Closer and closer the sound came until the explosive peals overtook my senses—the choir. Deep blasts quaked and clashed against one another with furious dread. Storm against storm. So fierce was the barreling explosions that "the bomb" would seem a firecracker. Each barrage more menacing than the next, violent, threatening.

BOOOOM ... BAA-BOOOOOM ... BA-DA-DOOOOOOOM!

At some point during the ferocious cracks, the beautiful song melted away. Whether the angelic choir fell silent or was overtaken by the deadly strikes, I could not be sure. Either way, the heavenly hush made it seem as if something too terrible for words was about to happen … like how a witness to a horrible car crash is rendered speechless just before impact, watching with bated breath. The blasts continued to crash over me like crushing waves when, all of a sudden, a voice pierced the gloom.

"FROM THIS TIME ON, YOUR WORDS WILL BE USED FOR MY GLORY!"

The commanding voice was a mix of growl and roaring avalanche. A thousand avalanches. Deep and guttural, it sounded greater than all the thunderstrikes combined, and deadlier. Too terrible to endure.

This was not the peace-filled voice I had heard on previous accounts. Not whatsoever. This was different, frighteningly different. This was the voice of an all-powerful God, thundering with indescribable power and

might. It was full of majesty, full of dread. With words alone mountains would crumble, it seemed. As to its owner, there was none equal, that much was abundantly clear.

Fear took hold. I could have died in that moment. That was how it felt to hear that ominous declaration. The words resonated within and without as it overtook every nerve and vessel of my being.

Nothing was hidden from its reach. If filled the room … filled the stars and sky. Even as it was speaking, I hoped it would stop. I felt naked, undone.

Quaking with fear, I curled into a ball and stammered, "O-Okay … Okay …" It was all I could do to keep from expiring. And for a moment, the words lodged in my throat, too afraid speak. I felt small before the formless voice, like an ant before some terrible giant who could crush it at will. One wrong word and …

Time froze. There was no telling how long the experience lasted. But when my senses returned, I realized the audible glimpse of heaven had given way to the biting *blizz* of an air drill. And all was right in the natural world.

Chapter Sixteen

The Warning

"*… if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.*"

— Jeremiah 18:8

EVERYTHING WAS OFF.

The peculiar dream had warped time, distance, and even space. It made the short walk to the park seem miles away. As dreams often do, the familiar setting had an unfamiliar feeling. Things felt tense, uneasy.

The dreamscape seemed awkward. It did that weird thing that happens in dreams sometimes … when you know you're in one place, but it feels like somewhere else. Well, in this case, I was in my old neighborhood in Florida, but somehow, it felt like I was in New Jersey. Odd.

A block over from my house, I found myself walking toward Earth Day Park, a small stretch of grass along a murky, gator-filled canal. Actually, it was hardly a park at all. There was no playground, no swing sets, no picnic tables, or anything that might suggest it was an actual park. Only a small wooden cabana near the canal bank marked its presence.

It was the kind of place neighborhood kids went to, to smoke pot and fuck at night. And bored Royal Palm Beach cops went to, to harass the kids who smoked pot and fucked there. What business did I have going there? Not sure. Probably to smoke pot, or fuck.

Along the palm tree lined street, something caught my eye—a 1960 Cadillac Coupe DeVille. It sat in a driveway to the right, its flamingo pink coat gleaming in the sun. It was long and luxurious, and polished to perfection. It had white wall tires with those vintage fin taillights that

reminded me of the bat mobile. It was the type of car a pimp might drive. Either that or some flamboyantly gay superhero. Elvis.

As I admired the sight, a man appeared from nowhere. He was as pale as moonlight, with eyes hidden behind shaggy hair as black as oil, and just as greasy. His ornate, leather cowboy boots were a perfect match for his black attire; shards of silvery sunlight danced from their silver tips as he walked. His sudden showing made me restless, somehow.

He seemed a vampire, or some personification of evil. Perhaps Elvis Presley's risen corpse.

Walking alongside the car, he ran a bony finger down the length of the glossy pink enamel. At the edge of the driveway, he motioned for me to come closer. He never spoke. Not with words, but thoughts.

Run! an inner voice insisted. But curiosity spoke sweeter.

Just see what he wants. No harm in that. Is there?

There was something magnetic about his shadowy presence, some strange draw that fought against my better reasoning.

A spell had taken hold. It was alluring and dark all at once. Difficult to resist. It felt as if I was being enticed, like a bird lured into the mouth of a fanged viper.

I turned his way.

I took three, maybe four, steps before a commanding voice arrested my thoughts.

Look up! It came with overwhelming force, splintering any thoughts about advancing further, breaking the powerful bewitchment.

When I did look, I saw the blue heavens had turned black, glittering with stars. A strange sight filled my vision. Above, the stars were formed in the shape of America. And over the starry outline, in bright bold letters, were the words:

I WILL THRUST HER OUT

A warning.

It stretched across the nation like a pennant. Those five little words filled the sky with deep scorn, terrible in its assurance. It was not an insult. It was a promise. A threat. It loomed over the country like the blade of a guillotine, ready to slice down at any instant.

Judgment.

While wondering at the sight, a cross suddenly appeared between the borders, at the heart of the nation. A luminous light—pure, white, and gleaming with the intensity of seven white suns, so bright it blotted out the surrounding stars. They grew pale in its brazen light then disappeared.

Next, the scene changed in a sudden flash.

A map.

It blinked into view, like the changing of a TV channel. It pictured a detailed map of the United States. Each state, with its shape and borders, was clearly defined. It was blue. Sky blue, in fact, with yellow-orange arrows pointing toward the Midwest. They were growing in length across the diagram, stretching toward their destinations.

A sense of starvation took hold—acute, painful.

Famine.

The word shot through my thoughts like a bullet. Hit hard. It was as sharp as it was certain.

The ache in my belly grew along with the arrows. Severe hunger gnawed at my stomach walls like starved piranha.

Then a revelation fell. It crashed upon my thoughts like a rushing fall. And in my mind's eye, a terrible blight. Crops failed. Land withered. Cattle died. Food depleted. Starvation ensued. Food shortages plunged the nation into chaos. Riots broke out. Panic. Many states suffered devastating loss,

and death. Starving citizens left their homes and livelihoods in a desperate search for food, for survival.

California emptied. Florida emptied. The East Coast, too. And a mass migration toward various northwestern states ensued—Illinois, Nebraska, Iowa. People flooded these and surrounding states in droves, states rich in corn production, where the arrows pointed.

The interpretation of the vision was this: Famine will grip the nation, and the extending arrows symbolized both a mass migration and where food could be found. For survival.

The vision was plain. Judgment had been pronounced. America would suffer famine. It had been written in the heavens, inscribed in starlight. No one and nothing could stop it. Americans had truly become sinners in the hands of an angry God.

The God of All Creation had been provoked to wrath by the nation's superabundant wickedness and evil deeds. Now justice must be served. There was no way of escape … but one.

To avoid the pending doom, America would need to turn from its evil ways, back to God through Jesus Christ. Only sincere repentance would stay the hand of judgment, and spare millions. If not …

Chapter Seventeen

A Secret Dream

"*All that we see or seem, is but a dream within a dream*."
— Edgar Allan Poe

THE DREAM CRASHED UPON ME around 7:00 a.m. It came suddenly and carried confusion. It was a dream like no other. Unlike most other dreams, I was awake when it happened, somewhat. The inexplicable events that unfurled were daunting and beyond bewildering. It was so daunting, in fact, that the dream has never been revealed to anyone. Mainly because it has yet to be understood. For that, it had been locked in secret for many years … until now.

The deep soma came on like a spell. Somnolent bands fell as summer rains, and with it an overwhelming heaviness. It was clear that the pot of coffee I had downed prior did little to stay the onrushing slumber. My attempts to resist it were futile as I struggled to keep my lids open. Heavier and heavier they grew until at last I succumbed to its dreamy embrace and was lulled helplessly to sleep.

The room whirled. Heavy-eyed and lightheaded, I crawled into bed and immediately blacked out. My head had scarcely hit the pillow before the dream began, stark, surreal, and unimaginably jilting …

The blue bicycle had crashed to the pavement, myself beside it. The hilly road I had serenely rode upon moments earlier came to an abrupt end. It was broken and jagged, as though torn by some violent quake. The end of the world.

The dead end looked over the mouth of a vast, winding chute the color of flame, twisting ever downward, like that of a water flume, only it seemed fire. The colors bled together in a tapestry of rich orange-gold and blood red hues as it snaked to untold depths below. Where it led was unknown. But it seemed there was doom there, unspeakable doom.

At the edge of the abyss, serenity gave way to horror. It presented a stark contrast to the easygoing vibe from moments ago.

At first, under a bright blue sky, I casually pedaled through soft, rolling hills and lush green fields. You could smell the freshness in the air. The airy sensation filled with a childish playfulness as I went. The euphoria seemed to grow with each passing hill. Up, down, then up and over again until a strange sight seized my attention.

On the edge of the road stood three hulking bald eagles, side by side. Massive and majestic, the giant fowl were as broad as they were tall; remarkable in size.

The raptors stood some twenty feet tall. Erect, their massive breasts puffed out before them, like proud soldiers standing at attention, wings stiff at their sides. They had great white heads and donned layers of thick, brown-black feathers, like chained armor. Their great yellow beaks, sharp as blade saws, seemed capable of snapping large creatures in a single snap. Equally intimidating were the talons, which clawed the ground like terrible iron spikes. They were aware of my presence.

There was a certain militancy to the creatures, authoritative. And their dark, penetrating eyes spoke of a certain agelessness. What wisdom lay behind them could not easily be determined. They stood still as statues. None moved, except the middle bird when he turned its great head to follow my movement as I rode past, slow, watchful.

The sequence shifted as dreams do, and next I found myself perched atop a great hill, larger than all others amid the surroundings. The bike rolled slowly, at first. Then it picked up speed, then faster, then faster still until the handlebars shook under the velocity.

Arms quaking, careening downhill, the front tire danced and stuttered over the pavement as I struggled to keep control. The ground behind shrunk away. If there were brakes, they were useless to halt the runaway cycle from its reckless course. *This ain't good* …

Soon, all control was lost. I fought to keep the wheels aground, but inertia proved the victor. I was ejected from the seat like a sinful thing until bike and body lay crashed at the end of the pavement, end of the world.

On my knees, I gazed into the fire-colored vortex with wary fascination. *Was this the portal to hell?* I could not be sure. In one sense, it seemed as though it could be ridden like a water slide or some great chute. Another sense, fear.

A small voice inside beckoned, *Take the plunge*, while another insisted, *Don't you dare*! But curiosity got the best of me. Only God knows why I stretched forth my hand into the whirling mouth. Myself clueless, and even more clueless about what would happen next.

Dread. Black dread coursed through my veins like hot, boiling tar. It consumed with tormentable fear, the anguish of a thousand wasted souls, thousands and thousands. I snatched my hand away as though snake bitten, but as I did, the dream again shifted in a sudden flash.

Fear jolted me awake. Or so I thought. Judging from the Led Zeppelin posters on the wall and the sunburst Gibson Les Paul in the corner, I was back in the safety of my room, and out of the crazy dream. Only, I wasn't.

I thought I had shaken myself out of the dream, like when you force yourself awake. But I was wrong. It was only a new scene in the series. I

was still out cold, and the final act had yet to play out.

Suddenly, a familiar figure appeared before me—myself, or some likeness thereof. The exactness was uncanny. A mirror image, stark and true to life. Twenty-six, slim, with shocks of curly brown hair that fell to mid-back. Only, its eyes told a different story. There was a certain brilliance in those dark eyes—alive, shining, with a vibrance that outshone my own.

Strange. It was me yet, somehow … not me.

While I gazed with fascination into those eyes, a revelation dawned. This was not me at all, but another in my form. The Eternal One. Not that I was Jesus Christ, by no means. But that He had utilized my form to convey something of meaning, some message.

He raised His hand and gestured with a finger, wagging it back and forth. It was a warning of some kind, as if to say, *You know that's not right. Don't do that.*

No words were exchanged. Only with His eyes did He communicate.

Next, the figure suddenly disappeared. In what could only be described as a thunderbolt, like a streak of electricity, the image exited near the back of the room, near the upper righthand corner.

I cried out after it, "Father, don't leave me!" as it trailed off through the ceiling, leaving the room.

A formless voice was heard at once. Regal and calm as a lake, it came from some lofty place, from unimaginable heights beyond the stars, saying, *In due time, I will give you the cup to drink.* It was spoken with a golden, velvety note that filled the room, my being. Clearer than any voice ever heard, it resonated with peace, power, and matchless majesty.

My eyes shot open, and I bolted from the bed.

Am I awake … really awake this time?

Yes. Wide awake, I could feel a surge of adrenaline rushing inside, like a thousand volts.

Who's gonna believe this? There was no one to tell. None would understand.

They'll think I'm crazy.

For a time, I paced the room, trying to make sense of it all, back and forth, back and forth, until I sank to my knees to pray for what was possibly the first time in my life.

Awkward and unsure, I petitioned the Lord for understanding. Speaking to the empty air felt almost as if I had lost my wits. In silence, prayers went unnoticed. At least by heaven.

Next, an irksome presence filled the room. I could feel it right behind me as I prayed bedside. It lingered close at my back. Too close. A cringing feeling crawled up my neck like a tarantula. *Don't look.*

It was at my ear now. I could sense it press close, as a lover about to whisper in your ear. Only, this was no lover.

Agitated, I scrunched my shoulder to my ear, as though shirking some pesky creature. *Go away, whatever the hell you are.*

A voice came. But not from heaven. From hell. Not the regal or golden kind but another. It spoke directly into my hearing, saying, "You may have gone to God, but you belong to me. You will always be mine. I will never let you go."

The words were smoother than satin. They were spoken with a certain placidity. Yet, beneath the silver-tongued statement lay an undertone of cunning and deceit. Smooth waters over jagged stone. It was subtle, barely perceptible, but certainly there. The voice of evil. Unquestionably, it was not at all what you would expect evil to sound like. It wasn't deep, gruff or

monstrous, but rather pleasant sounding, sly and soothing with a rather princely tone.

I saw no one. Only with my ears did I hear that calculating voice, the voice of sin and ruin.

Lucifer.

That was the day I was first introduced to the world of the supernatural. The surreal dream and demonic visitation left an indelible mark. For the first time, in a matter of minutes, I found that God exists. Jesus is real. Satan is real. And there are truly demons among us. The uncanny experience altered my life. I would never be the same, forever.

Section Four

Revelations and the Ruler of Worlds

The beginning and the end. There exists an invincible power over all evil. Find out the one true way to destroy demonic powers.

Chapter Eighteen

One King to Rule Them All

"*Whoever comes, whoever it is … I'll kill them. I'll kill them all.*"

— Keanu Reeves, *John Wick: Chapter 2*

AT THIS POINT, MUCH HAS been said about demons and their doings. Some scary stuff has been exposed. And you are probably wondering if there is a way to protect yourself from these unseen forces, if there is any hope.

Thankfully, yes!

Just as one ruler presides over all demon spirits, there is one who rules the *entire* supernatural world. A high commander, if you will. Stick with me as I make my point.

Now that your image of the devil or Satan has been reshaped, and that you now see he is neither a mustachioed man in spandex nor a horned beast, but understand his true identity, allow me to do the same for another grossly misconstrued figure.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

No matter your belief, it is important to move forward with an open mind, that any preconceived notions or criticisms be suspended, so that a clearer picture can come to light. Because, just as art and media have distorted Satan's character, so it has with Jesus. Maybe more!

And, no, I'm not talking about a lamb-carrying hippie in sandals. Nor a bloodied, anorexic man in diapers hanging on a cross. Neither which is entirely true. First off, the man Jesus was a carpenter by trade. It is highly unlikely that such a masculine figure would be caught walking around, carrying sheep on his shoulders. That's just weird. Secondly, Jesus was

stripped bare. Ancient Romans crucified criminals naked to publicly humiliate their detractors.

Jesus Christ was more than human. He was *superhuman*. Historians and critics alike attest to his extraordinary powers.

About 92 A.D., ancient Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, discussed the period when the Jews of Judaea were governed by the Roman procurator Pontius Pilate. He wrote:

> *Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.*[50]

Roman senator and historian, Tacitus, referred to the execution of Christ and the persecution of his followers in *Annals,* written around 116 A.D. The below context references the six-day Great Fire of Rome that burned much of the city in 64 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Nero. He states:

> *But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration (fire) was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus; and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind.*[51]

Furthermore, the Babylonian Talmud named Jesus (Yeshu or Yeshua in Hebrew) as a heretical magician deserving of death.

> *On the eve of Passover, Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come*

> *forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour, he was hanged on the eve of the Passover!*[52]

Now, historically speaking, we know that Jesus was crucified. But, in accordance with Hebrew law, the initial plan could have been to stone him to death. That was until Pilate intervened and punished Jesus according to Roman law. In this case—crucifixion.

In The Death of Peregrine, Greek satirist, Lucian, mocked Jesus and his followers with:

> *The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day —the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account… You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains their contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. So any adroit, unscrupulous fellow, who knows the world, has only to get among these simple souls and his fortune is quickly made; he plays with them.*[53]

The mention of Jesus Christ by Greek philosopher, Celsus, an opponent of early Christianity, survives solely in quotations from Origen of Alexandria's 248 A.D. refutation *Contra Celsum*. Celsus sought to co-join Jesus' miraculous healings with the acts of sorcerers. He argued:

> *But Celsus, wishing to assimilate the miracles of Jesus to the works of human sorcery, says in express terms: 'O light and truth! he distinctly declares, with his own voice, as ye yourselves have recorded, that there will come to you even others, employing miracles of a similar kind, who are wicked men, and sorcerers; and Satan. So that Jesus himself does not deny that these works at least are not at all divine, but are the acts of wicked men; and being compelled by the force of truth, he at the same time not only laid open the doings of others, but convicted himself of the same acts. Is it not, then, a miserable inference, to conclude from the same works that the one is God and the other sorcerers? Why ought the others, because of these acts, to be accounted wicked rather than this man, seeing they have him as their witness against himself? For he has himself acknowledged that these are not the works of a divine nature, but the inventions of certain deceivers, and of thoroughly wicked men.'*[54]

Yet, despite the criticisms, the historians' own words testify concretely that:

1. Jesus lived. He is a not a myth or made-up figure.
2. He worked miracles.
3. He had many devoted followers.
4. He suffered under Pontius Pilate.
5. He was crucified at the Passover.
6. Jesus rose from the dead after three days.
7. Followers died willingly for his teachings.
8. He was worshipped as God.

Consequently, the extra biblical accounts confirm what is written about him in scripture to a T.

Now that Jesus Christ's actual existence is proven true, let's further explore this most controversial figure.

When Jesus of Nazareth walked the dusty roads and shores of ancient Israel, he was revered as a miracle worker. He wrought extraordinary signs. He opened blind eyes. Made the deaf hear. Made the paralyzed walk. The dead live. Healed lepers. Forgave sin. Walked on water. Transfigured. Calmed seas and storms. In fact, he did so many miracles that one New Testament writer, the Apostle John, emphatically states:

> *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*[55]

Jesus' astonishing supernatural acts gained him widespread notoriety. Even kings wished to see him perform a miracle or two. But it was exorcisms that captivated the crowds … and enraged religious leaders.

Jesus has Power over Demonic Spirits

If ever there was an act that men and demons feared alike, it was exorcism.

Jesus' ability to expel evil spirits from the human body was a hallmark of his earthly mission. In the New Testament, seven main events speak of this remarkable power. One such account recalls a demon-possessed man from Gadarenes.

Known as the Miracle of the Swine, the event took place along the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Naked and crazed, he had cut his flesh with rocks until he bled and was often heard screaming among the tombs where he lived. The man had long been tormented by demons … until Jesus cast them out. Luke 8:28 records:

> *When he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him, and with a loud voice said, 'What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torment me!' For He had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For it had often seized him, and he was kept under guard, bound with chains and shackles; and he broke the bonds and was driven by the demon into the wilderness.*
>
> *Jesus asked him, saying, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Legion,' because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.*
>
> *Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and*

the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.

The story bears similarities to other exorcisms mentioned in The Bible. For one, demons immediately recognized Jesus Christ's divine identity, saying, "*I know who You are—the Holy One of God!*"[56] And "*What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God?*"[57]

Another, demons were utterly terrified of Jesus. At his appearance, they screamed for mercy and begged for their lives. No match for his power, they shrieked, *"Have You come here to torment us before the time?"*[58] ... or … *"I beg You before God not to torture me!"*[59] and *"Have You come to destroy us?"*[60]

Demons fear hell. The messiah's judgment looms over them like a henchman's blade. It is what darkness dreads most. Satan's worst nightmare. Evil spirits know that, in time, Jesus alone will pronounce their final death sentence and cast them into the burning abyss. Thus, Jesus Christ is the destroyer of demons. Death everlasting.

How eyewitnesses respond to exorcism is also worth noting. In the above-mentioned story, the pig farmers and townspeople reacted with fear and begged Jesus to leave their town. But, in most cases, crowds were filled with reverential awe. Amazed at his incredible authority, they exclaimed, "*He even gives orders to impure spirits, and they obey him!*"[61]

However, this was not the case with the religious leaders. They fumed with anger. When they watched Jesus heal a blind, mute, demon-possessed man, they seethed. With their authority threatened, they reviled Jesus with, "*This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.*" But Jesus answered:

> *'... If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you ...'* [62]

The religious rulers callously ascribed Jesus' power to Satan. In other words, they thought him a sorcerer. A black magician. But that was undoubtedly false. Jesus Christ's exorcistic powers not only demonstrated his supremacy over demonic spirits … it proved he was God in human flesh. For that, he would die.

From Cross to Crown

After crucifixion came resurrection. After resurrection, ascension. The earthly crucifixion he had suffered gained him a heavenly throne, where he is seated as Heaven's eternal king … "*far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.*"[63] That means the once-dead Jesus Christ now reigns supreme over every evil spirit, principality, over every demonic force or power. He is exalted above any king, queen, president, or leader who has, or ever will, come. Above every title that can be named or achieved. It means all nations, kingdoms, governmental powers, and armies are subject to his authority … now and forevermore.

Jesus Christ is without equal.

None can match his supernatural powers, nor the splendor of his majesty.

So, what does this King Jesus look like? For that, we must look to the apocalyptic final book of The Bible—Book of Revelation.

Exiled on the Greek island of Patmos for his Christian beliefs, writer, John the Apostle, foresaw terrifying visions about the end of the world … and the vengeful, bloody return of Jesus Christ.

In Revelation 1:13, he saw Jesus in his glorified state—all man, yet all God. He envisioned:

> *… One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength.*[64]

John nearly died of fright. He continued:

> *And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.'*

Old Testament prophets also speak of seeing a venerated man in heaven. In the Book of Daniel, named for its author, the writer envisioned a

heavenly court proceeding, declaring,

> *I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened.*[65]

In short, Daniel glimpsed Judgment Day.

In his extraordinary vision, the prophet Ezekiel also depicted a glorified man. He revealed:

> *... on the likeness of the throne was a likeness with the appearance of a man high above it. Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. Like the appearance of a rainbow in a cloud on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the brightness all around it. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.*[66]

Most biblical scholars believe this to be Christ preincarnate, an indication of his eternal nature. But it was John's vision in Revelation 19:11

where he glimpsed the second coming of Jesus Christ, prepared for war.

> *Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written:*
>
> *KING OF KINGS AND*
> *LORD OF LORDS.*

Make no mistake, this is not the picture of the broken, defeated weakling of popular culture. But rather a vicious Viking warlord hell-bent on vengeance against his enemies. With eyes ablaze with drunken fury, "*He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*"[67] In other words, he crushes his enemies like grapes under his feet, splattering their blood until his white robes are stained crimson.

Jesus Christ is a fearless commander-king. A ruthless, warring general, soldiered with a numberless host of angelic warriors—an invincible

supernatural military force. He is the commander of the Lord's army. All who oppose him die at the kiss of his sword.

The many crowns upon his head speak to his matchless reign, and the countless kings he has destroyed. It depicts a crown fashioned from the crowns of his fallen foes. By his unrivaled strength, he has stripped the shamed of their authority and triumphantly adorns their crowns as a trophy, in mockery of those who once mocked him. At blade's edge, these feeble mortals fall as meaningless nothings before the immortal conqueror.

Not only is Jesus Christ the King of Kings and Lord of Lords … but the Savage of Savages.

This is the Jesus Christ society should recognize, and fear.

The image of an all-powerful conquering king is one that has rarely, if ever, been portrayed. It is *this* Jesus Christ who spills the blood of his enemies. *This* who destroys the work of the devil. *This* who demons dread. *This* who crushes the influence of evil. *This* who spoils wicked schemes. *This* who breaks chains of darkness and sets free those enslaved under diabolical powers. And—*hallelujah—this* Jesus Christ who fights on your behalf to free you from the grip of evil. To give you power over hellish forces and every work of darkness, paranormal or otherwise.

Jesus Christ is *the* eternal champion over death, hell, and the grave. His resurrection from the dead is inarguably the greatest supernatural act in human history! By his rising, he has stripped all demon powers of their weaponry and authority. So great was this victory over evil that The Bible declares in Colossians 2:15 that he has *"disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."*[68] Because of this, he has command over every spirit, creature, or angel—fallen or no. Dark or light. Good or evil. Jesus Christ is king supreme of the supernatural world.

There is No Higher Power

Would you like this warrior-king on your side? Who wouldn't? Most evil set against your life is not of earthly origin, but spiritual. Malevolent forces are out *to steal, kill, and destroy*. This is the end game of evil—your destruction. Death.

The Bible says that our enemies are not human in nature.

> *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*[69]

What does that mean exactly? It means that the attacks of others, those who fight against you, do not come from individual people, specifically … but by demonic spirits which drive their thoughts and actions. They are tools in the hand of the devil—puppets, pawns. At times, certain troubles may come through people, inspired by evil. Others, by wicked spirits, apparitions, or disembodied voices.

Know that you are no match for such things. No amount of will power, strength, positive thinking, or wishing can drive away demons. No charm, chant, trinket, or the burning of incense or sage can scare off evil. Not even a cross. It is beyond human's abilities. Only one greater could defeat that which is supernatural, spiritual.

Jesus, in Luke 10:18, told his followers:

> *'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and*

> *scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.* ’[70]

This supernatural power was given to those who first trusted in Him. And this same power is available to you!

There is Hope

Do you want this kind of authority? Truth is, you can have power over demons. You never again have to fear evil. Dark forces will flee at your command. Chaos, despair, and destruction caused by wickedness can be restored. Your life can be made new.

Listen, it’s no coincidence that you picked up this book. It was for a reason—a purpose. But this kind of power is for those who not only believe in Jesus Christ but *follow* Him. Demons fear His name alone. And only by His name can you escape the dark powers set against your life … and the wrath of Almighty God to come. You need only to invite Jesus Christ, the king of the supernatural, into your life.

It would be a privilege to extend that opportunity to you right now. All you have to do is say a prayer that goes something like this:

> *Lord Jesus, forgive me for my sins. I believe that you are the Son of God, that you were crucified and rose from the dead so I might be saved. Come into my life. Be my Lord and Savior. Save me. Protect me from the Evil One and lead me all the days of my life. Amen.*

If you said that prayer, you are now a soldier-in-arms with me. You now have the power to stand against evil forces and influences, paranormal

or otherwise. You have joined the good fight of faith … and together, we will war against the forces of darkness. And win.

Now … *let's fight!*

One Last Thing …

Regardless of whether you said that prayer or not, I would love to hear from you. Send me a note as soon as you are finished to let me how your life has changed since reading my book.

You can reach out to me at:
Facebook: facebook.com/mrgorga
Instagram: @m.r.gorga
Visit: mrgorga.com

About the Author

MR Gorga, a former copywriter and journalist with film & TV credentials, brings his talents to the paranormal/horror genre. A child in the wake of *Amityville Horror* and the Summer of Sam, his talent for crafting horror was first recognized in the fourth grade.

“When my teacher called my parents after first reading the story, I thought I was in trouble,” he fondly recalls. “Instead, he announced, ‘Your son has a real talent for writing. Sign him up for the Young Author’s Club immediately!’ ”

His writing career now spans decades. Between writing, he plays a mean guitar and swills copious amounts of coffee. MR Gorga lives in partly sunny South Florida without pets.

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